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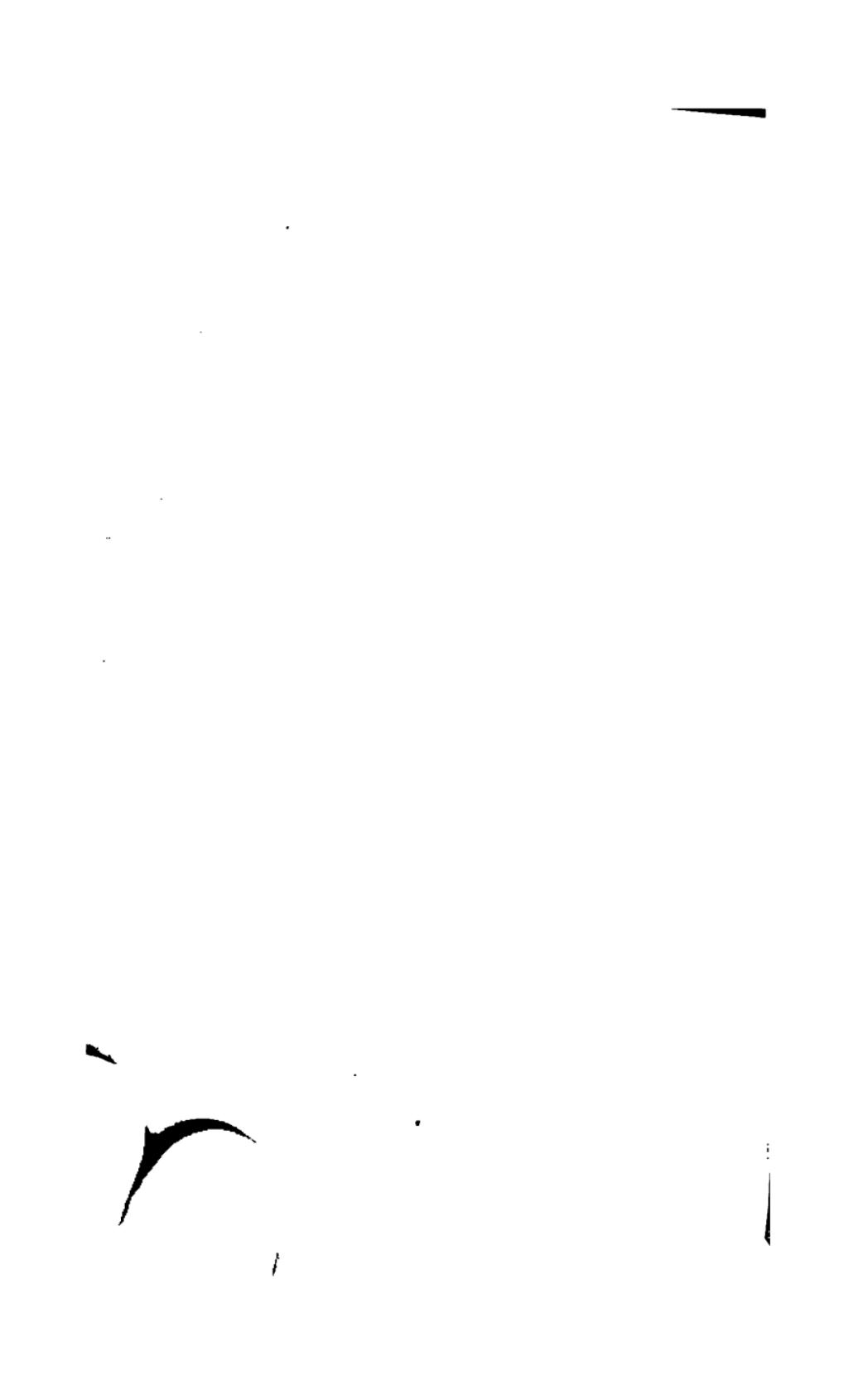
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ON CREDIT.

BY

LADY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF 'SABINA,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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ON CREDIT.



CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

IT was Christmas - eve, and certain indulgences were permitted by Mrs. Selwyn once during the year. A good dinner of beef and plum-pudding, and in the evening a large bowl of punch was brewed by James for the especial benefit of the servants. Of this O'Rouke had had by far the largest share ; and when she was required to sit up, as usual, for her master, she was obliged to be carried up to bed.

The Major, as was his custom, dined out,

and had to be waited for. Bella was lying on a sofa, with both candles drawn close to her, reading a novel she had brought from a circulating library at Exeter. She had a profound contempt for all the innocent heroines who adorned the works of that period; but she hated sewing, and the nonsense amused her, she said.

Master Ned had retired to his crib early with a headache, partly produced by the blow on his nose, partly by the glasses of rum-punch bestowed on him by James.

Mary came to the door, and asking to speak to Miss Selwyn, informed her of the state of affairs with regard to O'Rouke. Mariana answered that she would arrange for the sitting up for the Major, and told Bella that as he was her husband, she ought to perform that duty herself.

‘Really, Mariana, you seem to think that my naturally delicate constitution, enervated by fifteen years of India, is as strong as your

own. Why should not you sit up for the Major?

'I think 'tis more the duty of a wife than a sister-in-law,' said Mariana. She looked at Bella, and saw a sneering smile on her face; and fearful of any reference to her former attachment, she hastily said she would do it. Mrs. Selwyn, who was rather deaf, had not heard of the dilemma.

When Mariana had consented, she became disturbed by the thought of what she had brought upon herself. If the Major was too drunk—dreadful word!—to get upstairs without assistance, to whom should she apply for aid? She would infinitely prefer the stable-work, and the feeding and watering the horse, to the loathsome duty of putting an intoxicated man to bed. In thinking the matter over, she quite came to Swift's opinion as to the infinite superiority of the larger animal.

What a horrid creature was this Major, on

whom she had formerly doated so fondly! It was only that morning, before he left the house, that she had gone into the drawing-room accidentally, and found him putting on his boots before the fire, with a cigar in his mouth. Men at no period look well in that occupation. The Major, with rubicund face, starting eyeballs, and compressed lips, with one extended leg half thrust into a twisted boot, was anything but an attractive object. By his side was a half-consumed jug of beer. Mariana stole out of the room: she dreaded the tardy devotion of the Major, and always avoided him when not compelled to be in his company.

About two o'clock, Lady Westwood called on Bella. She was the only titled lady in the thinly-sprinkled neighbourhood, and was 'old style,' and very particular in those on whom she bestowed the favour of her countenance. Mrs. Selwyn had always been so respected since her merits had ceased to be obscured

by the shadow of her husband's extravagances, that the compliment of calling on Bella was meant for Bella's mother.

Mrs. Selwyn never permitted her servants to say, 'not at home.' So Bella, not being sufficiently dressed to appear, Mariana went into the drawing-room, and discovered the visitor in curious contemplation of a pair of very dirty-looking slippers straggling on the hearth-rug, and the stale beer in the glass.

'It only wanted a spittoon,' said Mariana piteously to her mother afterwards, 'to give it a pothouse look completely.'

So Mariana thought that James should, as the servants say, 'see to' the Major, and she would feed and water the horse, till that ubiquitous servant should return to bed him up.

Mariana never indulged, even on Christmas-eve, in punch, or indeed in any fermented drinks. She was not much given to reading, as their library was limited. 'The

poor have no new books.' But they certainly better prize the few they have.

Mariana, having finished the darning of the last pair of stockings with exquisite precision and neatness, took up a volume of Thomson's poems, and read 'Winter,' as being an appropriate subject on Christmas-eve.

She was carrying her enjoyment of the description far into the night, and was the only person awake in the house. James slept by the kitchen-fire, partly bemused with punch, and partly because 'twas as well to get as much sleep as he could, to provide for future calls on his wakefulness.

The night was dark, and Mariana could only just discover a shade of difference between the old gateway, with its stone lynxes each side, and the sky. A few flakes of sleet fell softly against the window-panes, and did not break the deep silence of the scene. It was very cold, and Mariana envied James his place by the kitchen-fire ; but she wrapped

her old cloak about her, and had filled one of the Major's empty wine-bottles with warm water, on which she placed her feet to remove their numbness.

All this time the beautiful Bella had sunk amongst her downy pillows, contemplating, till sleep closed her delicately-veined lids, a fire piled half-way up the old chimney, which would be still alight when day dawned.

Mariana wondered why Bella should ever be most loved, and petted, and waited on. Mariana had only her mother to love her; and she, even she, seemed more attracted by Bella's folly than by Mariana's efforts to act rightly, in which, indeed, her success was undoubted. Then she asked herself the question, whether she would consent to be Bella, to have her want of principle, and the consequences of it, as exhibited in her husband and progeny. No, certainly not. She would rather be the neglected and despised old maid; for certainly she had arrived at

an age when she could no longer call herself a young maiden.

Yet it was hard that she should have to stay up watching for a drunken brother-in-law, when the wife, whose duty it was, was sleeping luxuriously.

As she thought of this—it seemed very late for even the Major to be out—she consulted an old enamelled watch—a giant it would have been considered amongst watches of the present day—which was rather given to hurry its movements, as if it were in haste; because, like the evil one in the Revelations, its time was short. Allowing it to be half an hour too fast, the real time seemed to be three o'clock. She went to the window and opened it noiselessly, to listen to any distant sound. She fancied she heard the trampling of a horse, but it ceased, and she believed she was mistaken. She was about to close the window, for the sleet fell unpleasantly on her

nose, when she believed that she heard the sound of the horse's hoofs a second time. 'He is certainly coming now,' she said to herself. No, it was nothing—nothing but fancy. She had scarcely let the sash half-way down, when the galloping was heard fast and furious. It was scouring over the road, and stopped at the gate. 'I must go down now, or he will ring a loud peal at the bell and awaken my mother,' said Mariana to herself; and with this benevolent intention she went swiftly down the stairs, without awaking James, and passed into the dark courtyard to the outer gateway. 'He has not rung yet. Can't find the bell, I daresay; 'tis so dark,' thought Mariana. So she felt for the latch and set the door open. There was no one to be seen. Could she have been deceived by fancy altogether? She strained her eyes through the darkness, and, perceiving nothing, was about to close the door, when she was startled by some-

thing cold and soft touching her hand. In the nervous state to which her watching had reduced her, she could scarce forbear a scream; but, moving gently, she felt a horse's nose pressed against her, trying to pass into the yard, with a very keen notion of finding a supper and a bed there.

'Why did you not ring?' said she, addressing the Major.

There was no answer, save that the horse snorted, as if he knew a great deal about it, and could have revealed the truth had he been gifted like an inferior animal mentioned in Scripture. Mariana still believed her brother-in-law was on the horse, till, as the animal bounded forward towards the stable, the empty stirrup struck Mariana in the face. Then the full sense of the fact dawned on her. The horse, relieved of the Major's weight, had been discursive; sometimes stopping to see if any grass could be found at the road-side, sometimes thinking

of his feed of corn, and galloping towards his temporary home. The Major had had an accident—had been thrown or tumbled off—and was now lying somewhere between this and Exeter. Mariana went and opened the stable-door, that the horse might find shelter, and then felt her way back to the house, where James lay, with his head resting on his folded arms, asleep on the kitchen-table.

‘O James, awake !’

‘Yes, miss. The Major home, miss ?’

‘O James, get your lantern and go out to look for him. The horse is come back with an empty saddle.’

James lit his lantern deliberately. More haste, worse speed, was his maxim. When he had done so, and fastened the snap, he proceeded to the yard, followed by Mariana.

‘Where’s the horse, miss ?’

‘O, I opened the stable-door, and he has gone in.’

‘Sensible creeter,’ said James. ‘His corn and hay is ready, and his bed too. I’ll just take off the saddle to ease him, and put on his cloth, poor beast.’ James took his time.

‘James,’ said Mariana, ‘I think you must really make more haste after the Major.’

‘Well, miss,’ said James, looking sheepishly out of the corners of his eyes at Mariana, and made bold by the fumes of the whisky-punch, which had not as yet had time to subside, ‘to go along that road at night, and all past the churchyard, is what I won’t do for all the majors that ever got drunk on port-wine.’

‘Why, surely you would not be so cruel as to let him lie there in the road—dead very likely, or half dead? Give me the lantern. I’ll go myself.’

‘No, no, miss,’ responded James coaxingly. ‘I’ll never have it said that I let a lady go alone, to pick up a dead man very likely. It may please the Lord that

we may find him this side of the church-yard ; and then it won't be so awful. We'll go together, miss.'

And Mariana wrapping her cloak round her and drawing the hood of it over her head, they proceeded along the high-road, slowly casting long streams of light from the lantern towards the ditches on each side of them, half hoping, half fearing to see a great dark mass of inert manhood lying by the road-side. They had gone about a mile of the way and seen nothing. The track of the horse's hoofs were visible, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, where the thin layer of sleet showed a slight indentation. The irregularity of the traces gave Mariana the idea that he had fallen or been thrown before, and that they had not passed without seeing him, as she sometimes feared might be the case. They were near the churchyard now, and James began to hang back.

'I should not wonder, miss,' he suggested, 'that the horse broke away from the groom afore the Major mounted him at all, and that he is now safe and sound asleep in his bed at the Golden Hart. He could not get another horse all of a hurry, you know, miss,' added James, who perceived by Mariana's silence that she was entertaining his suggestion. She thought it probable, and hoped it was so, for with every forward step her horror of finding the dead and probably disfigured body of the Major seemed to increase. 'The best thing we can do, miss, is to go home and go to bed. Somebody will come over from the Golden Hart when 'tis daylight, and fetch the Major's horse for him to ride home.'

As Mariana hesitated, between a sense of duty prompting her onward, and of cold, fatigue, and terror urging her to accept James's solution of the mystery and to return home, the candle in the lantern, which

had been but a short end when they started, suddenly flamed up and went out.

‘Drat the nasty thing!’ said James, who had a horrible dread of being in the dark, close to the churchyard too.

‘There is a strange-looking light just before us,’ said Mariana. ‘A man carrying a lantern very carelessly. How fast he is walking! Stop, stop, my man!’ she cried, running forward. ‘We want help.’ But the light did not arrest its progress.

‘O, miss, for the Lord’s sake don’t be venturesome! ’Tis not a man, though they call him Jack and Will. There! it has stopped for a minute over something black by the ditch.’

Mariana seized James’s arm, turning very sick and faint.

‘Did you see anything?’ said James, in a voice made low by awe.

‘That is he! that is the Major, I am sure,’ said Mariana, trembling all over.

The will-o'-the-wisp, after a fantastic dance over the dusky heap which lay with a stillness that left undisturbed the sprinkling of snow which had fallen on and partly covered it, disappeared with a leap over the hedge.

‘O, good Lord ! that is certainly the Major !’ whispered James ; whilst Mariana felt an indescribable and unreasonable dread of going up to the inert heap, distant from her but a few yards. She thought of the young English officer who, after the massacre of Scio, seeing a beautiful Greek girl lying, as he thought, asleep on the ground, placed his hand under her head to raise it, and felt his fingers slip into her brains. She had the same horror of touching this man—a horror aggravated by darkness, and the doubt whether he was alive or dead.

‘We must get some help, James,’ she said, in a voice almost inaudible from terror.

‘Yes, miss, that we certainly must ; for we can’t see whether he is only hurt or killed.

The clerk's house is not more than a half mile off. I might get a bit of candle from there, and he'd come back with me.'

'O James, I had rather go. I know where he lives;' and she started off, but found James by her side.

'I'm not going to stay here,' said James. 'I would not stay between that dead man and the churchyard for all the money in the world.'

Mariana thought that he had expressed her feeling perfectly as regarded the unsightly heap by the road-side; and she sympathised too perfectly with his dislike to the dreary watching to contend farther.

'We will go together, miss,' said he in a comforting tone. '*That* will take no harm,' indicating by a jerk of his head the body of the unfortunate Major.

'No, James,' replied the lady in a tremulous accent; 'some one must stay by him.

Any one might drive over him; animals might attack and gnaw the body. Make as much haste as you can, and I will remain till your return.'

'Yes, miss, yes,' cried James, and was lost in the darkness before he had finished speaking, so terrified was he lest Mariana should change her mind and recall him. 'If I was to lose my place,' thought he,—'and the old lady isn't a bad one to live with,—I could not stay with that dead man for all the world.'

Mariana seated herself by the side of the inert heap, and cowered down to keep herself warm.

There lay the lover of her youth; and memory played fantastic tricks with the sad lady, recalling what he had been in his youth and bloom—

'Gallant and gay in beauty's proud alcove.'

The leap made by time over fifteen years

seemed to have returned him to Mariana not himself, but a different man altogether.

With her head buried between her knees, and her hands clasped over her brow, she was stupefied into drowsiness by the cold, and dreamed that he was again the lover of her youth, whispering vows of eternal constancy, and wooing her to seal with her lips the contract which was to bind them for ever. How fresh, how cool and balmy was then that ruddy-tinted mouth! How clearly bright was the dark blue of those Milesian eyes, with the edge of the iris deeper in colour than that which surrounded and contrasted with the pupil! How thick had been the brown eyelashes, and the clusters of his luxuriant curls!

‘Mariana!’ he seemed to say, ‘Mariana!’ and his arm stole round her waist, whilst her heart beat faster from the pressure.

Just then she fancied that some one called her in reality, and lifting her head, received

on her face a cold sprinkling of sleet, which aroused her fully.

She had slept but a few moments, but it seemed as if she had spent half a life-time in those golden seconds.

She looked round, though it was well-nigh useless in the darkness that surrounded her. She was sensible that the thin sleet hung on the folds of her cloak, and more thickly on the immovable substance at her side. The form of the church stood out, dimly marked on the gloomy sky. Suddenly the clock struck four. The sound produced a prolonged vibration on the dark tower. The tones, heard in that stillness and under such circumstances, were to Mariana indescribably awful. Time was left to her to make up her last account ; but, alas ! what was it to him who had so greatly wasted and misused it ?

She turned involuntarily towards the object of her thoughts, to that helpless un-

moving heap of unconscious flesh. Where was he now? He who had been for years of the earth, earthy, could he now exist in spirit? Was he hovering over his disgraced clay, disgraced by acts done in the flesh? The idea that his consciousness was near her filled her with unutterable terror. Her eyes, their lids distended, were fixed on that mound of earth that half an hour before had been full of eager sensual life. Her eyes were watching him, her ears alert to distinguish if any sound of returning footsteps broke the silence of the night; but she heard nothing. She fancied at that moment that she distinguished a dull movement in the churchyard. She half dreaded to turn her head, which had become confused by superstitious terror. She thought of little Elia as she last saw her, with that unutterable pathos in the eyelids and brow which spoke of calm succeeding to agony; of the smooth shining hair brushed over the forehead; the little helpless hands

with the listless half-bent blue fingers ; the white nightgown placed smoothly over the chest, which ever seems so unnaturally projecting in a corpse ; her mouth shrunk to a blue line ; her cheeks wax-like in colour and texture. She knew where the rough heap of earth was which marked her grave. Where was she now ? Would her spirit welcome her father's to the realms of space ? She fancied the child rising from her coffin and coming through the white sleet towards her, and could scarce forbear to scream ; for the wan stiffened form, lying so still in her coffin, was become an object of dread, invested by imagination with motion.

She wrapped her cloak over her face, and tried to steady her mind to the realities of her watching.

As she was thus enveloped, she heard a muttered sound close to her, which made her heart for an instant stand still. She threw

back the cloak, and looked towards the body of her brother-in-law.

The dark mass seemed in motion. A howl like that of a wild animal was followed by a succession of yells. The creature was alive, and struggling to rise; with the strength and ferocity of a maniac he leapt towards Mariana, and seized her; but luckily his grasp embraced the cloak; and as in the agony of her terror she sprang away, the fastening broke at the throat, and she fled along through the darkness, followed by the reeling stumbling tread of her pursuer.

The churchyard presented to her terrified thought a temporary asylum. If he followed her, he would stumble probably over the graves, and she could hide behind a tomb-stone. If unfortunately even in the darkness the gleam of her white dress made her figure evident, the stone being of the same colour would serve to conceal her.

She ran to the white gate, followed by the

madman ; and reaching it, sprang over with an activity which seemed to her like the feeling one has of flying in dreams. He was close after her ; but she calculated that in the effort to surmount the gate he would lose his balance. Nor was she mistaken. As she sped along towards the porch, she heard him fall heavily on the gravel, and remain without movement.

She now began to breathe more freely. He was mad, this dreadful creature, in his frenzy scarcely retaining the attributes of humanity. What could she do ? remain and watch him ? He might recover again, and finding her, seize and strangle her in his delirium.

She shrank down behind the tombstone. After remaining there some time, she heard the sound of men's voices, mingled with that of a boy. They had no lights, and sang as they approached, in tones of solemn triumph,

'O murky night, dispel thy shade !
O sun, illume each hill and glade !
Fling thy glad beams to gild the morn
On which the Saviour-Boy was born—
Born of a maiden undefiled,
Of stainless mother, stainless Child ?'

Mariana had forgotten that it was Christmas morning in her distress; and the harmony of the simple carol was infinitely soothing to her troubled mind. There was help, too, within reach, if she could but make them understand that she required their aid. She dared not approach the gate, where the object of her terror might clutch her as she passed; but she knew the names of two of the men who were the usual choristers on these occasions; and, without daring to show herself, she cried in a thin, clear, and plaintive voice :

'Robert Ayrton ! Robert Ayrton !' and again, 'Robert Ayrton !'

At the first cry the psalmody stopped, and the feet of the musicians were arrested on the muffling sleet. At the second sound of that cry, so uncanny and weird, blank dismay

seemed to fall on the group. At the third utterance they took to their heels and fled along the road, as if pursued by shapeless spectres from the churchyard.

Mariana, becoming desperate, now cried out to the other chorister :

‘ William Willis !’

But they were nearly out of hearing. They ran, and stopped not till they reached the door of Robert Ayrton’s house.

‘ Go in, neighbour,’ cried the clerk in a quaking voice. ‘ It came upon us like a thief in the night. That call from the dead was for you. You best know who lies in that churchyard that has a grudge against you; but you’re as good as a dead man, neighbour.’

‘ I fear that’s true,’ said Robert, with chattering teeth ; ‘ but I’m sure I heard your name called as we ran, William Willis.’

‘ O Robert, don’t do me that ill-turn to say such things !’

‘ Come in. My missis is asleep,’ said Ro-

bert. ‘We’ll make up the fire, and have a glass of hot ale, with a bit of spice, to warm us and keep up our spirits. Come in, neighbours. Let us count the money. Perhaps if we put a shilling of it in the poor-box, the judgment may pass away.’

Mariana, finding she had scared away those from whom she had hoped for protection, determined to leave her brother-in-law where he lay, and return home. She could do him no service by remaining there. James had probably found no one to assist him at the clerk’s house, as he was out with the waits, and had gone on farther in search of help. Her horror of the recumbent body was too great to admit of her passing him even; and she knew that he was safe from being run over where he lay. So she crossed the church-yard, stumbling over the graves, catching her toes in the thorns wherewith they were bound, and leaving pieces of her dress in the brambles which impeded her way. She had to

make a circuit; and passing over the part of the road where she had kept watch by her brother-in-law's side, she put her foot on the cloak, which she seized gladly, and, shaking off the snow, she wrapped herself in it, and went home as fast as she could.

There were no cottages at which she could give an alarm. She knew the risk of leaving the insensible man where he was lying on the snow-sprinkled gravel-path of the churchyard; but, till James came and brought help, she could do nothing. Prudence, too, suggested that her own life was valuable. Should she die, who would protect her mother from those harpies who not only devoured her substance, but polluted all that their voracity relinquished? She would go to her room, and try to warm herself; for she was chilled to the very marrow of her bones. She seemed to have lost all commiseration for that dreadful creature in her terror of him.

The clock struck six as Mariana reached her home. It would be two hours yet before daylight came. But James would not know where to find the Major if she went to bed without communicating with him. She would not disturb her mother; and to talk to Bella was worse than useless. Her mother's female servants detested the Major for all the trouble he gave, and were not likely to exert themselves for his sake. Mariana therefore awakened O'Rouke, thinking that she had probably slept off the whisky-punch by that time; who aroused herself with many outcries on the blessed Virgin, and understood the dilemma with more quickness than the lady had anticipated.

‘Truth, then!’ said she, ‘I’ll take a candle in the bed-lantern, seeing the stable one is gone; and I’ll bring the Major back myself, if it’s any sense he’s got left; and if he hasn’t—and ’tisn’t much he has at the best

of times—I'll stop with him till daylight, and get some help; for, shure, the folks will be coming early to dress the church with holly-berries, and they'll help me to bring him home.'

Mariana now felt for the first time that, though her mother's servants would have been utterly scandalised at the excess in whisky-punch which had made bed imperative to Judy O'Rouke, they would have also been incapable of the eccentric attachment which made the Irishwoman willingly leave her warm bed two hours before dawn on Christmas morning, with the prospect of sitting an unlimited time in a snowy church-yard by the side of a senseless body. Mariana blessed her in her heart, fetched her a warm shawl of her own to wrap round her, and would have lent her the cloak, but it was heavy and wet with sleet and snow; and then, closing the door after her, she procured some hot water from the tap by the side of

the kitchen-fire to fill the wine-bottles, and got rid of her soaked garments, and rolling herself round in bed, was glad to forget that drunken men and heartless wives existed; and having whilst waking gone through all the phases of a bad dream, she went to sleep too tired to dream at all.

CHAPTER II.

CONJUGAL TENDERNESS.

AFTER all, O'Rouke was partially relieved of her lonely watch ; for, whilst hastening towards the churchyard with Mrs. Selwyn's bed-lantern, armed with which that active old lady was in the habit of making unexpected raids on the stable at unexpected hours, to the distraction of James, O'Rouke saw that worthy compound of coachman and groom coming towards her with a look of painful awe in his countenance ; the truth being, that he recognised that horrid little lantern, which was for ever associated in his mind with his mistress, and fully expected that, having been alarmed in the night by

the unusual circumstance of the absence of her daughter and the unlocked stable-door, she had come out to seek him. It was a wild notion; but everything on that night seemed wild and uncanny. He was really relieved to find only the gigantic frame of the Irishwoman, illuminated by the streaming light of the lantern. James could not be persuaded to go within the awful precincts of the churchyard to pick up the Major unless he had companions. O'Rouke boldly determined to remain with her master; whilst the coachman again directed his steps in search of aid.

This time he turned across some fields, and aroused the labourers, who had hoped for some prolongation of rest on their holiday. They came at his summons, however, and prepared themselves for transporting the Major to the Aspens by taking one of the cottage-doors.

He was drowsy, and too insensible to make

any resistance as they placed him on the improvised support. And thus the dreary procession trudged along the road, and arrived at their destination just as the cold dawn glimmered in the horizon. O'Rouke preceded them with long strides, crying and bemoaning herself as she went as to the loss she should sustain ; for the ‘Meejur,’ barring he loved to have a drop of the ‘cratur,’ was the best of masters, and ‘wuth’ twenty of his wife, for all she was so good to look at.

It is worthy of observation, that female servants always prefer their masters to their mistresses ; why, I cannot pretend to say. In the present case, O'Rouke was probably right in her judgment, and of two worthless folks Bella had the preëminence in want of probity ; for, being cleverer, she had stronger material to work with. However, on mature consideration, I doubt there having been a pin to choose between them ; both being as wicked as their intellects permitted.

Mrs. Selwyn was up as usual, and was coming down to ring the bell for prayers at eight o'clock, when O'Rouke encountered her.

'For the sake of the blessed Mary, turn into the dining-room, ma'am, or ye'll see what will go nigh to break yer heart.'

Mrs. Selwyn, however, stood as if riveted to the spot, and heard the shuffling footsteps entering the hall, and saw the listless form of her insensible son-in-law borne on the shoulders of the men. A ghastly Christmas-box for her! 'In here,' she said, opening the door of the dining-room, for she did not see a chance of their carrying him up the stairs without dropping him; whilst if her poor darling Bella should hear them and come out, what a fearful shock it would be to her! 'Put him down gently while we make a bed on the sofa,' she said softly, as if the object of her solicitude could be disturbed by any tone, loud or low.

O'Rouke brought the bedclothes down

from the dressing-room, and whilst she undressed her master, assisted by James and the men, Mrs. Selwyn nerved herself to the task of preparing Bella for a knowledge of the truth. She opened the door softly, with a heart that ached at what she was about to inflict. The embers were still alight in the grate, and the dim daybreak was struggling through the heavy damasked window and bed curtains. The mother put them aside gently, and let the fresh morning light fall on the sleeper, who lay in a glory of golden hair tossed carelessly over the pillow and falling over her bosom. A mother might be forgiven the feeling of pride and admiration with which she regarded the form of her beautiful child. Bella's face was most lovable in sleep, for then there was no evil passion expressed, only the sweet languor of repose.

‘It must be told, it must be told,’ thought the poor mother, and stooping

down, she kissed the pure-looking brow of the sleeper.

Bella smiled and uttered a word, some name unfamiliar to her mother. Then she raised one arm slowly, and put it over her mother's neck, drawing her down towards her.

'O my child!' cried Mrs. Selwyn, "'tis not your poor husband; 'tis your mother.'

Bella opened her eyes thus addressed.

'Why, mamma,' cried she, 'it can't be time to get up yet. Those horrid waits kept me awake all night.'

'Bella darling! you must arouse yourself. Awake! O Bella!'

And Mrs. Selwyn turned her head aside, and leaning her forehead against the bed-post, she wept aloud.

'What's wrong now, mamma?' cried Bella pettishly. 'You have always something or another to worry about. I suppose Julietta has cut her finger, or Ned has swallowed a pin.'

‘Major O’Connor has had an accident, Bella.’

She raised herself, leaning her elbow on her pillow and her head on her hand ; and the light streamed in between the curtains and illumined her perfect face, as she turned it round towards her mother in speechless inquiry.

Mrs. Selwyn said nothing, and Bella became deadly pale. At length the wife said, in a harsh unnatural tone,

‘Is he dead?’

Mrs. Selwyn said that hope must have inspired her poor child, or she never could have had such a glitter in her eyes as she asked the question.

‘No, my poor darling, not so bad as that. He is, I fear, insensible ; but cheer up, Bella, we will do all we can for him. It may please Heaven to restore him to you and to his children.’

‘Just ring for O’Rouke to put on my stockings, mamma.’

‘ Could you not just put them on yourself for once ? You see, O’Rouke is undressing him, and getting him to bed in the dining-room.’

Bella did not answer. She was trembling all over and very white. A great deal depended on the result of this accident to her. She put on her Cashmere dressing-gown, thrust her white plump well-shaped feet into fur slippers, and descended to the dining-room, to judge for herself what might be her chance of widowhood. The Major, with half-opened eyes and a whole-opened mouth and flushed face, did not look any worse than Bella had been accustomed to see him after a debauch for the last five years.

‘ Is he bruised, or cut about the head ?’ she inquired of O’Rouke.

‘ No, ma’am, not that we can see. I put just a drop of ale into his mouth, and he swallowed it; so I hope he will get over it this time.’

‘ Bah ! he’ll do well enough. ’Twas a

pity to bring him in here, messing the dining-room. I am sure I shall never fancy any meals in it again. He is only drunk as usual. Dear me! how this coming downstairs has chilled me, on Christmas morning, with next to nothing on! O'Rouke, come and warm my bed. I shall go to sleep again. Those dreadful waits entirely spoilt my comfort last night. They ought to be prosecuted.'

Bella went up again, and calling to O'Rouke to make up the fire and put a pan of hot coals over the bed, she betook herself again to her repose, saying, 'What an ass mamma must be not to know a drunken man when she sees him!'

Mrs. Selwyn unfortunately did know a drunken man when she saw him, but she knew, moreover, that a crash must come soon in the oscillating materials that lined the Major's skull; and she knew also that this crash was very likely to be accelerated by a

fall from his horse on a Christmas morning, with the supplement of lying several hours on the snowy ground. When Mrs. Selwyn talked of that inestimable father and husband, with hope of his being yet restored to his children and wife, she, notwithstanding her tenderness for Bella, which was the weak point in her character, knew that he was valuable only as representing a certain amount of pounds shillings and pence, the pay of the efficient services rendered to the British army by that active and meritorious officer, who, had he been a private, would have been ignominiously dismissed the army. To be sure he had purchased his steps, and with them the right to get drunk. What was to become of Bella and her children if he should die? Who would pay all the expenses they had incurred since they had been at the Aspens, if Bella were left destitute? Her head became giddy in the effort she made to calculate even in round numbers the sums

for which, to her knowledge, they were indebted; and she suspected—what was the fact—that she was not aware of half of them.

She went to the dining-room, and gave the breakfast-things out to Mary to be laid in the library. The Major was lying in the same state. ‘How could Bella marry that poor creature!’ was her thought, forgetting that sixteen years before he had been an exceedingly handsome man. Mrs. Selwyn, who had hitherto felt disgust and dislike to O’Rouke, now called her into council.

‘Have you ever seen your master thus before?’

‘Och! then, often and often, but never to look like that.’

Judy was carrying out one of the characteristics of her nation. By her own account she had and she hadn’t.

From Judy Mrs. Selwyn learnt the circumstances of the past night, and the share Mariana had taken in them, though she had

no idea of the extent of the aberrations of the Major's intellect, nor could understand why Mariana had not arrested the choristers on the way home, nor how her son-in-law came to be lying in the churchyard in his fall from his horse. However, she would not have her eldest daughter awakened. Surely, if the wife slept, the sister-in-law might enjoy her repose. She went to the library to make breakfast, moaning mentally over the necessity of keeping up another fire. Perhaps the Major would be well again to-morrow, and obviate the necessity for its continuance.

She read prayers to Mary and the cook, for none other was present. The children had their meals with O'Rouke in the nursery, and Mariana, generally so constant in her punctuality, was asleep.

‘Who is sitting with the Major now?’ asked the mistress.

‘The ayah, ma’am. O’Rouke is dressing the children.’

Mrs. Selwyn drank her weak tea, and ate her dry toast, and longed to be in the quiet company of Mariana.

Bella was beautiful ; but then Mariana was so neat, and so attentive to her mother's comfort. She had just put the teapot by the fire to keep it warm for her elder daughter —the younger would require some freshly made two hours hence—when a loud shriek was heard from the dining-room, simultaneously with a howl like that of a wild beast, the sound of which made Mrs. Selwyn's blood run cold. Her terror transfixed her for a moment ; but a repeated cry, apparently half-stifled, made her hasten to the spot from which it proceeded, when, flinging the door open, she saw the ayah on the floor, and the Major, with his knee on her breast and his two thumbs pressed on her wind-pipe, had nearly succeeded in depriving her of life.

Mrs. Selwyn gave an involuntary cry of

terror, but the maniac never turned round his bloodshot eyes on the new-comer.

He was too intent on his occupation, and seemed to take a hellish delight in the convulsive efforts of the unfortunate woman to breathe, which he showed by the grin spread over his swollen features. The light of insanity shone in his eyes. Many words are required to describe effects which are instantaneous.

Mrs. O'Rouke was going up the back-stairs when she heard the scuffle and the cries, with a loaf and a knife in one hand, and a kettle of boiling water in the other, for the nursery breakfast. She put down the kettle, and, opening the door, saw the danger of the unhappy East Indian. Quick as light she flung the loaf and the plate and the knife on the floor, and, leaping behind the maniac, she placed both arms round his neck, and pulled him backwards on herself as in the effort she

sank into a sitting position. As the shock made the madman release the ayah from the pressure of his thumbs on her wind-pipe, he compensated to himself for the loss of that pleasure by kicking-out violently. Mrs. Selwyn dragged the poor woman, who was too insensible to help herself, out of his reach; and the Major, finding Judy's grasp was not removed from his neck, began to bellow frightfully, and gnashing his teeth, to endeavour, by twisting his chin, to fasten them in the hands or arms of O'Rouke.

'For the blessed Virgin,' cried the Irish woman, out of breath, to Mrs. Selwyn, 'run for help! for hold him much longer I cannot; and if he gets hold of the knife, he'll murder us all!'

Mrs. Selwyn snatched it up and rushed downstairs, where she was encountered by half-a-dozen men touching their hats, and hoping madam would remember them for the trouble they had in bringing home the

Major. ‘And such a “lug” [i. e. load] he was, ma’am, you have no idea,’ they chorused.

‘Certainly,’ said the poor lady, whose powers of spending were rapidly drawing to a close; ‘but I want you upstairs, for the Major seems not quite in his right mind.—Mary, show these men up to the dining-room. Quick!—make haste!—And, cook, give me the clothes-line!’

Mrs. Selwyn, thus armed, followed the countrymen to the room where Judy was struggling with the Major, who had managed to rise; and though she hung on his arms she could scarcely prevent his fiendish resolve to stamp on the ayah, against whom his rage seemed principally to be directed.

He was so intent on this, that Mrs. Selwyn put a rope in the hands of one of the men, and directed the strongest to pinion the Major, whilst the others passed the ropes round and round his arms, making them tight, so

that he could not reach the knot with his hands. Then the same process had to be taken with his ankles ; during the whole of which he yelled and howled like a wild beast.

Mrs. Selwyn waited till she had seen him placed like an unwieldy log on the sofa, and then went to her little store to give the men five shillings each for their trouble, and to dismiss them. Five shillings was ample, she thought, without a supplementary breakfast ; and to avoid this added expense, she dismissed them by the front-door. Then with O'Rouke she turned her attention to the unhappy ayah, whom she properly imagined would be a greater expense and encumbrance dead than alive, considering that the cost of the funeral would probably come out of her pocket.

With many doubts and hesitations she sent James to fetch Mr. Jackson and the physician. Her idea was to send the Major to a lunatic asylum ; for he was as utterly unsafe as unbearable in a quiet household,

and she knew that the signatures of two medical men to an affidavit would be necessary for this. Her brain seemed whirling with trouble and perplexity. How was he to be kept at any asylum? Would he be allowed his pay when he was more utterly useless than ever? Would he be allowed to sell out? Could a madman sell out? She knew nothing of military law or military customs; but she foresaw a future of misery to herself if he lived a lunatic, or died leaving Bella and those disagreeable children a burden on her small resources.

After she had drank hurriedly a cup of tea, she brought some to offer to the recumbent patient.

She knew that his mouth must be parched after the extraordinary noises he had been making. He was quiet when she returned to the dining-room, but his eyes took no cognisance of her person as she approached him. With tender pity she placed her hand

under his head, and approached the tea to his lips with the other. He no sooner felt the edge of the teacup than he caught it between his teeth, and biting a piece out of its side, upset the rest of the fluid over his shirt and bedclothes. Then, as she strove to wipe it up with a clean handkerchief, he bit at her hand, with the most malevolent expression on his face, but with eyes ever averted.

Presently, in a violent effort to break the ropes which bound him, he rolled helplessly on to the floor. Mrs. Selwyn went to fetch O'Rouke; but they were utterly unable to lift his weight, and contented themselves with placing pillows under his head.

CHAPTER III.

A FAIR WOMAN WITHOUT DISCRETION.

IN the mean time Bella's bell was keeping up a perpetual peal for O'Rouke.

The world might go to wrack, but Bella's stockings must be put on by somebody. Besides, where was the hot water for her bath? O'Rouke, when not in the dining-room with the Major, was ministering to the half-strangled ayah in the servants' hall. At length, finding her bell unanswered, Bella sent Master Ned to see why she was not attended to; who, though he was less of a dove than a raven, did return to the maternal ark with this succinct narrative, which he delivered in a business-like tone, which

proved him to be a youth of great nerve, not likely to be upset by unexpected occurrences :

‘Papa has nearly strangled the ayah, and O’Rouke is trying to bring her to life. They have tied papa’s arms and legs with the linen-line, and left him on the carpet. When they go away, I shall undo the knot and let him loose. It will be such fun to see him tumble about!’

‘O,’ said Bella, ‘better leave him alone. I will see to him presently. Go and tell Mary she must come and dress me ; and she must bring the water for my bath.’

Bella, having been dressed, went down to breakfast. In the confusion which had pervaded the house, *her* breakfast had not been attended to. Bella did not find her mother in the breakfast-room, but she did find the teapot left on the hob to be kept warm for Mariana. She poured out some of the tea, which was sufficiently strong, but, having

stood too long, had a coarse flavour of the stems of the tea-leaf, in Bella's opinion ; so she rang to have the teapot emptied and refilled.

'Two sausages for me, and a devil for the Major !' cried Bella ; 'and here's flabby toast ! What Christian is going to eat *that* ?'

'The Major—the devil !' said Mary, stammering.

'The Major—the devil !' responded Bella, mocking. 'What is there extraordinary in that ?'

Mary thought in her heart that it was 'like to like ;' but she only said she was afraid the Major was too ill to eat.

'Nonsense !' cried Bella. 'He'll eat fast enough. But do the sausages first, for I'm hungry.'

They had just been placed before her twenty minutes later, when Mariana, looking pale and worn by the events of the past night, entered the room, longing for a cup

of strong tea and hot. (Mariana, like all water-drinkers, preferred the stimulant of very hot tea and coffee. It gives them the comfort which others, who indulge in fermented liquors, derive from a dram; and though this pleasing heat does not affect the head, its influence on the stomach is very deleterious.)

Bella heard Mariana's step outside the door, and hastily filled up her teacup a second time, leaving none in the teapot. As the elder sister seated herself at the table she put her hand towards the sausages, not intending to take any, but to cut herself some bread—the loaf being in a line beyond those savory smoking viands.

'You had better order some more sausages if you want any,' said Bella, putting both on her plate; 'I require these. It is necessary that my constitution should be kept up, after all my sufferings in India from the dreadful heat.'

Mariana looked at the magnificence of

Bella's figure, and wondered in her heart where the delicacy could lurk which was so exigeant.

Bella had drawn the rack filled with the fresh toast to her side ; and Mariana, finding no tea, made the kettle boil, and pouring some water on the strength-leaves, made herself an infusion of discoloured fluid. She thought with a smile of the wife who complained that her husband had left her nothing but cold water to drink, and his retort, Why didn't she boil it ? as she drank the beverage which, like bad oratory, was so hot and so weak. Then she took a piece of the flabby toast Bella had rejected, and freshened it by the fire on the small toasting-fork. She would have preferred cutting and toasting a fresh piece from the loaf, for Mariana was very particular, not to say old-maidenish, in her notions of niceness ; and she did not fancy the pinchings and pokings the bit she took might have received from

Bella's fingers before she rejected it. So she tried to console herself by Lord Clarendon's speech on receiving again the Great Seal, which he had restored to Charles in disgust on the king's nominating an unworthy person to an important office. The king flung the nomination on the burning coals, and the chancellor took up the seal, saying, 'Fire purifieth all things.' So Mariana hoped that the chance contact of Bella's fingers might be burnt off in the little particles of brown which she scraped off with the knife when the bread was re-toasted. She wished to ask after the Major, but she dreaded Bella's sneers as to the tender interest she was supposed to take in her husband's health.

Now, seeing that Mariana had left her brother-in-law lying in a heap just inside the gate of the churchyard, and that she had seen no one since she had awakened to give her any information as to the other adven-

tures of the night, that dread of Bella's tongue must have been very great to stifle the feminine curiosity which she naturally felt. Nothing bad could have happened she felt sure, or Bella could not have been sitting there drinking all the strong tea and eating all the sausages.

When the elder sister had drank her cup of hot water, and eaten her bit of dry toast, she went up to her room to get her work-basket, and saw Dr. Fox and Mr. Jackson ride into the yard with hurried movement and grave faces :

'They carried fate and physic in their eye.'

Then she heard the quiet ring at the front entrance, and the stealthy tread of feet; the dining-room door opens gently and closes; and Mrs. Selwyn, coming up to Mariana's room, tells her the whole circumstances.

Mariana shuddered as she heard of the ayah's perils, and felt half choked at the

thought of what might have been her fate in the lonely road alone with a furious maniac.

‘The doctors are with him now, my dear,’ said Mrs. Selwyn. ‘Poor Bella does not seem to know how very ill he is, poor man! She thinks it is one of his usual attacks, which will go off again. It *may* do so; but in the mean time ’tis very frightful.’

‘O mother, mother, how happy we were before this dreadful family came!’

‘Yes, why—yes, my dear, certainly; but it is not quite right to call poor Bella’s a dreadful family. ’Tis worse for *her*, poor thing!’

‘I don’t agree with you at all,’ said Mariana, with allowable indignation. ‘Bella is selfish to the very core. She makes herself comfortable, let those suffer who will’ (Mariana was bitterly thinking of the sausages). ‘She has so low a standard of morality, such obtuse perceptions as to right and

wrong, that I am convinced, if she thinks on the subject at all, she considers it perfectly right that she and her tribe should come and devour your substance, like the palmer-worm—which she represents; whilst her husband is the canker-worm, and her children and servants the locusts and the caterpillars. That which the palmer-worm hath left, the locust hath eaten; and that which the locust hath left, the canker-worm hath eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten.'

'My dear,' said the mother in a troubled voice, 'I do not see how I could have acted differently. It was, perhaps, wrong in me ever to have forgiven Bella, and to have seen her on board the ship after she married. But let us take another view of the subject. Had Bella died in India unforgiven, should I not have been a miserable woman to the end of my life? And after all, had she lived unforgiven, and announced

her return to me after a lapse of fifteen years, could I have shut the door in the face of my daughter and her husband and children? The mistake I made was in sending her to that school, and removing her from my own influence. This dreadful marriage might then have been prevented; for I saved you, Mariana, and might have saved her.'

'I doubt it,' replied Mariana drily. 'Bella was always indulged when a child, because she was a beauty; and now she is tolerated and loved more than I am, because she is a beauty still.'

Mrs. Selwyn could make no answer to this, because she felt it to be true; and the click of the handle of the dining-room door warned her that the doctors were coming out, and that she must gather their opinion as to what must be done.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

MRS. SELWYN went down in a dress of faultless neatness, the very perfection of a woman who disdained the effort to reduce her age even for an hour. Her gray hair was parted smoothly under a plain muslin cap, and a gray shawl pinned closely over her trim figure; a little plaited collar stood up round a throat which age had deprived of its roundness. Her step had the elasticity of youth, from her constant activity, and from never having worn high heels; a practice utterly subversive of grace, by destroying the play of the foot—for women of the present day, with feet stiffened by the unnatural elevation at the heel, clump along like peasant

women in pattens, to say nothing of the stooping gait, which gives the notion that a slight impulse given in the rear would send them on their noses.

Mariana looked after her with admiration, and with a love which she felt at the moment all the more, from the conviction that she had beaten her mother in argument.

‘I wonder,’ thought the elder sister, ‘how Bella will look if she lives to the age of her mother? I can fancy her clinging to the semblance of youth, with false teeth, false hair, false bloom, false bust.’

Good folks often predict eternal punishment for their friends in a future world, which seems to give them intense satisfaction in this mortal state. Mariana only carried her prophetic view to the probable result of a youth of folly.

‘What do you think of the patient?’ said Mrs. Selwyn, showing the doctors into the library, which Bella had deserted.

The physician asked for an account of the events of the past night, which Mrs. Selwyn gave succinctly. She was overwhelmed at the scandal on her quiet house thrown on it by her harbouring such an inmate, and felt inclined to exclaim with Lady Macbeth,

‘What! in my house!’

‘The question is, whether he should be removed to a lunatic asylum?’ she said.

The doctors hesitated. They thought the insanity was only occasioned by drinking: probably he would be sane before twenty-four hours had passed, and in that case the risk and expense of moving him would have been undertaken in vain. ‘He may be as well as usual in a few days, or he may have an attack of delirium tremens and die, or recover after some days’ illness.’

‘But what is to be done now?’ said the poor lady. ‘It is dreadful to leave him with

the cords cutting into his poor arms and legs.'

'Doctor Fox, madam, will send an attendant fitted to coerce Major O'Connor, if necessary; and I will remain with him till this person may arrive. We will have a proper strait-waistcoat if he be riotous; but I hope as the hours go on, if he have no more stimulants, he may become quiet and manageable without having recourse to any measure so painful.'

Mrs. Selwyn was grateful, and in some measure relieved at the responsibility being taken from her shoulders; but she dared not leave the house to go to church, as she had always been in the habit of doing. So she called Mariana, and they retired to Mrs. Selwyn's bedroom, which had to be rearranged in a hurry that morning, as Mary wanted to exhibit a black-chip bonnet, trimmed with scarlet, at the morning service in the parish church, which service Mrs. Selwyn read to

Mariana, who had no new bonnet to exhibit.

It was one o'clock; and Mr. Jackson thought he might leave the Major—who, exhausted by his struggles, was lying quietly—that he might enjoy a bit of the roast beef, the savoury smell of which had saluted his nose each time the door of the dining-room leading to the back-stairs had opened.

Mrs. Selwyn had asked him to take some luncheon at their early dinner, and he had accepted, after ringing the bell for O'Rouke. Instead of O'Rouke, Bella entered, and said imperatively that *she* should stay with her husband. So Mr. Jackson, perceiving that as he lay he must be harmless, left the room. Bella's digestion was good; but after a plentiful meal of sausages and toast at half-past ten o'clock, she pitied herself for being unable to enjoy roast beef at one. Her appetite was so indifferent, she said; so she dressed herself ‘in sable stole of cypress

lawn,' and went in determined to overwhelm the apothecary by the spectacle of her exceeding beauty and majesty.

When he had left the room, she sat down by the sofa opposite the Major's countenance, and with her white dimpled hands folded on the rich fabric of her black dress, gazing at him curiously.

Presently the rustling of her silk dress, as she placed one knee over the other, disturbed his irritable brain, and he opened his eyes and knew her.

‘Bella!’ he cried in a sad plaintive voice, ‘Bella, it hurts so, these nasty ropes! Why did you let them use me so cruelly? Why did you do it?’

‘Law, Major! I didn’t do it. I never knew you were tied up so. I suppose they did it for some good reason.’

‘But it hurts so, Bella!’ and the Major began to cry.

‘What hurts—your arms or your legs?’

‘O, the arms, because the ropes cut into me as I lie on them. Bella, Bella, if you ever loved me, undo these nasty ropes, and give me a little ease.’

‘Will you promise you won’t hurt *me* if I let you loose?’

‘You know I never laid a finger on you in my life, except in love, Bella.’

‘Well,’ said Bella, ‘you must try to turn on your face, that I may find the knot.’

‘I can’t turn unless you help me.’

Bella contrived to turn his face to the back of the sofa, so as to get the light on the knot; and with great inconvenience to her delicate fingers, she at length, with the penalty of broken nails, contrived to loosen the ligature, and leave the Major power to use his hands. When he was free, he begged her to rub the places which the cord had deadened. He thanked her when he had received this comfort, and kissed her tenderly—a caress from which she would

have shrunk if possible, but could not. In fact, she did not think of him with the usual amount of disgust, for she had just conferred a kindness on him, and had been a good wife, she flattered herself.

‘Hide away the rope, Bella,’ he whispered, ‘for fear they should do it again.’

‘I will,’ said the wife; ‘but now for your feet. I must untie the cord, and rub your poor ankles: your feet are quite blue. Lie back quietly, and if they come, they won’t know whether you are unbound or not.’ |

The sick man looked at her with eyes made eager by anxiety.

‘Where will you put the rope?’ said he.

Bella looked about, and then pushed it down between the sideboard and the wall. ‘No one will think of looking for it there,’ she said.

The poor fellow, restored to comparative

comfort by the freedom permitted to his movements, turned on his side and fell asleep.

Bella resumed her watching and her speculation on the duration of his life. His constitution was formed with perfection of structure of both external and internal organs, which promised length of days beyond what the Psalmist has enumerated as the span of man's life. All medical men under whose care he had been had agreed on this point; but he has had delirium tremens twice before, and the third time, thought Bella, is generally—lucky, she was going to add, but pulled up even to herself.

'Well, be it said,' she continued in her reverie, 'he can't live for ever on mamma; because, like the sloth, he will eat up all the leaves of the tree; and then, if no other be within reach, what is he to do? Neither the Major nor I can do without our com-

forts. They are few enough here; but I suppose in the workhouse they would be fewer. Really the poor Major is better out of the world, for his own sake.'

She opened the door very stealthily, and crept to the library, where she saw her mother slightly flushed by her efforts in carving, Mariana making up for an indifferent breakfast by a good dinner, and Mr. Jackson enjoying the delights of a comfortable meal, which, to his dismay, the beautiful Bella seemed determined to interrupt.

'I only came to say,' said the wife, 'that the Major has gone to sleep quietly; and as I mean to stay with him, it would be advisable that no one should enter the room till I ring the bell, lest he should be disturbed.'

'Most judicious, ma'am.'

'He is perfectly sensible,' added Bella; 'and I do not imagine any additional help will now be required for the next few hours,

when we can have the man-servant within call.'

'Certainly not,' said the subservient Mr. Jackson, 'if you are of that opinion.'

'O Bella, my dear, take a slice of beef with you, and some potatoes and gravy.'

'No, thank you, mamma; I have no appetite.'

'I daresay the poor lady's feelings are too many for her,' said the doctor, as Bella disappeared. Then rising suddenly, he darted out of the room after her, and caught her as her hand was on the handle of the dining-room door.

'I need not enforce on you, madam,' said he, in a voice tremulous from eagerness, 'that our patient must have nothing but slops—absolutely nothing but beef-tea, or coffee, or chocolate; but—'

'*That* he will not fancy.'

'The only stimulant must be a tablespoonful of brandy in some arrowroot, every

three hours, shall we say? if the pulse seems to require it. I will see him again to-night, and trust all will do well.'

The doctor rattled over his directions in order to get back to the beef, and Bella answered with a courteous bow and a—

'Certainly; I am accustomed to nurse the Major under these circumstances.'

He slept still when she came back.

'Dull work to sit here, doing nothing but look at that bloated face,' said she.

She went upstairs, and brought from her room a lapful of novels; and then stirring up the fire, she sat with her feet on the fender, in a position which commanded the sofa. If he awoke raving, she would spring on him at once, after ringing the bell which was close to her; for she knew by experience that the Major was by no means agile in his movements.

The Major slept for three hours, and awoke better.

‘Why am I in this room?’ he said, gazing on the paper.

‘You have had an accident, Ned,’ answered his wife.

‘Thrown out of a gig, eh?’

‘No, off Bruce’s horse.’

‘A vicious brute!’ ejaculated the Major, not seeing that he was himself the vicious brute.

‘Major, don’t you think you would prefer sleeping in your own room? This dining-room strikes me as being very cold. Can you walk?’

‘Yes, of course I can; but,’ as he tried to stretch himself, ‘I feel as sore as if I had been horsewhipped.’

‘No doubt you were bruised by the fall from your horse. Will you have James’s arm to hold you up?’

‘No, of course not. Do you think me a baby?’

‘Wait till I get your slippers.’

‘Yes, go and get them.’

Bella went as fast as she could run ; but when she returned she found the Major fumbling at the cellaret, which he could not open.

‘Tis of no use ; they have locked the cupboards,’ said Bella. ‘Come up with me. You are to have arrowroot—’

‘Arrowroot be d—d !’

‘And brandy in it.’

‘Then give me the brandy without the arrowroot. Let me have them separate.’

‘Well, come upstairs now, and I will put you into the great bed, my bed—not the dressing-room, because you are ill, you know.’

‘Ill?’ said the Major. ‘Do they think I shall die ?’

This was said in a tone of awe perfectly thrilling.

‘To tell the truth, Major, I think it probable that you will die,’ said Bella, with

charming candour, ‘because you are drinking yourself to death. I have no doubt your stomach has become like a piece of fried leather. You know that you live, like a woodcock, on suction.’

‘Bella, Bella, I *can’t* die ! Die, die ! and go I don’t know where ! Tell me it is not true—tell me I shall live ! Do, my beautiful wife ! O,’ he cried, with a fearful yell, ‘I cannot die !’

‘Well, don’t ; nobody wants you to die, that I know of.’

Bella rather boggled at this part of her speech, feeling that it was not true.

‘What can I do to get well, and keep well, Bella ? Look : I need not die—see how strong my arms are—how well-built I am !’

‘Well, well, Major, give up strong drinks, and I daresay you will recover. You must take some solid food.’

‘I *can’t*, Bella ; I am so sick.’

‘Well, then, the arrowroot and brandy.’

‘Must I have the arrowroot with it?’

‘Yes, if you wish to live.’

‘Then don’t let them mix it out there. Let the bottle be brought into the room—only that I may *see* that it is put in,’ he added, with the craft of a maniac.

‘Very well, you shall have it when you get upstairs.’

The Major rose, but staggered and sat down again.

‘I can’t go up without having the brandy first,’ he said.

‘All right,’ said Bella; and she rang and ordered O’Rouke, who had just sat down to her Christmas dinner, to make the Major’s arrowroot.

O’Rouke went to Mrs. Selwyn for the materials, and the good-natured lady sent her back to the kitchen, saying that she would make it herself.

When it was properly boiled, Bella came

and took it to the Major, with a brandy-bottle in one hand and the small basin in the other.

He held out his shaking hand for it ; but Bella placed the arrowroot on a small table, and putting it near him, measured out a tablespoonful of the brandy, and poured it on the mixture. Before she could stir it, he had tilted the basin, and drank off the fiery spirit unmixed.

‘Tis nothing ! not enough to wet my lips,’ he said, in a tone of great disgust ; and seizing the bottle, he put the mouth to his lips, and drinking down a long draught, gave a sigh of satisfaction. ‘There !’ he cried, ‘now I am better. I can go upstairs now without help ;’ and he rose and walked steadily up to the bedroom. ‘Bella, you said I might have the large bed ?’

‘Yes, if you like.’

‘Have you brought the rest of the brandy up ?’

‘Really, Ned, you are very greedy. You will kill yourself.’

‘Nonsense, Bella; you see how much good it does me. I am not half so sick—not sick at all. Brandy is so comforting;’ and he lay down in the bed; but suddenly raising himself, he asked the time. ‘Awake me at three,’ he cried; ‘I am engaged to dine at the mess.’

‘All right,’ said Bella. ‘Now go to sleep.’ And the obedient husband turned on his side and slept.

CHAPTER V.

DELIRIUM TREMENS.

BELLA, seeing that her husband was soundly asleep, began to consider her own comforts. She was hungry again. She thought of the beef, half hot and half cold ; that would never do. She rang the bell, and on O'Rouke's answering it, she ordered a few slices to be cut off, and devilled for her dinner.

' Cook, dressed in her best mourning, was just going off to afternoon church in Bella's gifts ; and thinking, not unnaturally, that if the donor was always going to prevent her wearing them she had not much to be grateful for, declined to begin cooking again.

O'Rouke said she *should* devil the meat for her mistress. On which the cook locked

the larder, put the key in her pocket, and walked off defiantly to church, with a feeling of tremulous triumph, leaving Judy in a state of rebellion by no means congruous with peace and good-will towards men.

She went flaring up to Mrs. Selwyn to complain that her mistress could get nothing to eat, and that she had been insulted by ‘that dirty slut,’ &c. To which Mrs. Selwyn listened attentively; but as she would not promise to give the old servant warning on the spot, O’Rouke carried her complaints to Bella; who, receiving them in the place of the savoury dish she had anticipated, was aroused into fury, and proceeded to vent it on the person who, as she knew, loved her best, and would be least likely to rebel under the infliction, her mother. But for once she was disappointed, and her efforts to inflame her mother were sparks falling on ice. Mrs. Selwyn looked at her tenderly, and said,

‘My dear, you should have spoken to *me*, and not have given the order yourself. Then *I* would have devilled the beef for you; for the cook had performed her duties for the day, and was going to have her reward in attending divine service. To dismiss her, or even to reprove her, would be manifestly unjust.’

‘Then am I to starve in my mother’s house?’

‘I trust not. She will have returned by half-past five, and will prepare the devil for you at our tea-time.’

Bella flounced out of the room, saying to herself that she was glad she had forged the cheque and deprived her mother of a hundred pounds.

She returned to her bedroom in high dudgeon, and looked at the sodden face of her husband as he lay in his death-like sleep. Then she, as she warmed herself, looked carelessly at the brandy-bottle which she

had placed on the chimney-piece, and perceiving that the cork was only half in it, took it up and saw that it was empty. She smiled and put it down.

‘He has been out of bed again,’ she said, ‘and drank it all. *I* can’t help it, if he will kill himself. I gave him fair warning, I wonder,’ she said, looking at him scrutinisingly, ‘how long it will take. This place is getting intolerable to me. Mamma, with her justice indeed, and her proprieties, and her stinginess; and that old-maidish thing Mariana, and those intolerable children!’ and Bella sat by the fire and pondered on futurity.

Bella had taken the Major to her own bed; for she said to herself,

‘If I am to nurse him, I had better do it with as much comfort to myself as I can command; and no one can attend to him with as much regard to his wishes as myself;’ and she smiled sweetly.

At tea-time, Bella came down to the library to join her mother and sister at their evening meal. A dish of smoking devilled beef was placed before her, and although she had predetermined not to give her mother the satisfaction of seeing her eat any, the savoury smell of broiled meat was too much for her resolution, and she ate it with such satisfaction and good-will, that she did not leave any for the other two ladies.

I fear Mrs. Selwyn regarded the disappearance of the viand within Bella's rosy lips with satisfaction. She loved her so tenderly, that she could not bear that she should be vexed; and was not Mariana accustomed to go without everything she wanted? Poor Bella always had been indulged, and required it.

'I am astonished, mamma,' said the younger daughter, when she had finished eating, 'that, however led away you may have been by your dislike to poor Ned, you should

have gone to the extent of such cruelty, because he was rather the worse for wine, as to have him bound hand and foot like a criminal. Yes, poor fellow! the blood has stagnated round his poor arms and ankles. They may mortify, for aught I know to the contrary. To hear his complaints, and see the tears of so strong a man, would have touched any heart not of stone. But you were always cruel and unjust to poor Ned, the best husband and the kindest father that ever breathed'—and Bella put her hands to her eyes—‘and you show it by having him treated with gross cruelty when the poor fellow is insensible.’

‘Why, Bella?’ cried both Mrs. Selwyn and Mariana simultaneously.

‘O yes, Miss Selwyn, we all know what *your* feelings are on the subject. You never forgave him for deserting you for me, when you sobbed and cried and hung round his neck to beg him to be constant to you.’

This was sufficiently true to be very provoking; we none of us like to be reminded of caresses lavished in vain.

'Bella,' said her mother quietly, 'your love for your husband is a great excuse in my eyes for your injustice. He would have killed the ayah had O'Rouke not rescued her. Ask her yourself.'

'Killed, indeed! I daresay he only wanted to correct her for her indolence and ill-conduct. And there was *my* husband, a major in the army, overwhelmed by brute force and manacled like a felon, all for correcting a native! Certainly you have an eccentric way of showing hospitality and kindness.'

'Well, my dear, I have done all for the best. If you are not satisfied, I am sorry.'

Bella could not give utterance to any farther retorts; for a ring at the door-bell announced the return of Mr. Jackson, and Bella rushed upstairs to remove the empty brandy-bottle and see that the room was

only in elegant disorder. It was her room, and it was as well to make a favourable impression even on an apothecary.

Then she directed O'Rouke to introduce him, when, standing by the bedside, she was ready to answer the usual questions.

‘What has the patient taken?’

‘Only some arrowroot and brandy.’

‘More than once?’

‘No.’

‘Dear me!’ with finger on pulse. ‘Wonderful stamina! Pulse very full even now. Is there any wandering when he is awake, madam—any violence?’

‘O, dear no! As quiet as a lamb.’

‘Very satisfactory indeed. I shall only make one visit to-morrow. You will keep his extremities warm. If the face become more flushed, an application of half water and half eau-de-cologne on the head will have a beneficial effect; a little composing draught if he is restless. I have brought it

in case it should be wanted. Good-night, madam.'

'Allow me to light you down,' said Bella courteously; and she held the candle high, so as to throw a favouring shadow over the upper part of her face.

'What an exquisite creature is Mrs. O'Connor, and what a lady!' was the doctor's thought. 'That comes with mixing with the world. The old woman and her eldest daughter would have let me tumble downstairs rather than have gone out of the way to light me. They say the old woman is a dreadful screw—would skin a flint. No light in the staircase, as there should be.'

Mrs. Selwyn and Mariana were taking part in family prayers with their two female servants, requiring all the comfort they could get out of the performance to tranquillise their feelings; whilst Bella, prayerless, was about to be assisted into bed after having been undressed by O'Rouke.

She gave a look at her husband, and saw not much amiss in his appearance; and going to a case, of which the small gold key hung round her neck, she took from it a glass of liqueur for herself of choice quality, and another for O'Rouke.

Bella was generous of articles she never paid for. She did not indulge in any way likely to affect her looks. The purity of her nose was an object of greater consideration with her than the purity of her mind. No one could say that she had ever been detected in any excess. This made her indulgence of her husband's foibles more admirable.

The liqueur put her to sleep; and Judy, having smacked her lips, went down to hurl defiant looks at the cook, who, in return, gave her scant measure in her pint of beer, and cut her a piece from what is vulgarly called the 'heel' of the cheese.

However, the refined dram she had par-

taken with her mistress, and the pleasure of boasting of it, and proving how much better her mistress was than the old lady who reigned over *them*, had so elevated her spirits, that no bitterer quarrel ensued than that carried out in taunting looks.

Bella slept and dreamed.

She dreamed of scenes far off under the sultry skies of India, and of more recent ones acted within the last few days. She dreamed of going to the bank with her forged cheque, and that little Elia in her grave-clothes stood within the baize door, and said she could not pass in. Then she thought that she heard nothing, but saw the Major gliding along the room like a ghost without moving his feet, and that he went out of the open door and disappeared in the darkness.

The distant barking of Mariana's dog, who slept at the feet of his mistress, awakened Bella, and she raised herself

with her elbow on her pillow and looked around.

The night was half gone, she thought, on seeing how far down the rushlight had sunk in its perforated shade. But how was this? Had that careless Irishwoman left the bedroom-door open? No; she remembered wondering whether the click of the lock as she shut it would awaken the Major.

She had felt so convinced that he was close to her, that it was not till she had observed all these circumstances that she looked round and saw that his side of the bed was empty. Her heart began to beat fast.

‘He has gone mad again,’ she said, ‘and is gone to kill some one perhaps. What a blessing that he did not murder me! Perhaps he is gone to commit suicide. No chance of that,’ she murmured; ‘he is too fond of himself! ’Tis really very creepy not to know. Perhaps ’tis Mariana that made the dog bark. What a shivering

night!' said she, putting her feet into her swan's-down slippers, and taking her dressing-gown from the chair.

Then she lighted her candle, and went over the house, trying the different doors of the sleepers' rooms. They were all fastened on the inside; and noiseless as were her movements, they were detected by the dog, who barked sullenly, as if he were not quite sure of his ground, but chose to expostulate with the disturber of his slumbers, though she was one of the family, and not to be attacked like a thief.

Bella grew colder and colder as she descended the stairs. She was a brave woman, but she started on seeing a light in the hall. On consideration, she thought it was not an indication that thieves had come in, but that the Major had gone out; and opening the door softly, she prepared to follow him.

But whither? She knew not which way to turn. There was a fresh frosty smell in

the night-air, and the shrubs, which caught a gleam from the candle through the open door, glittered with their pure white incrustations. The sky seemed tremulous with quick-eyed stars, and there was not a sound in the air to break the solemn reticence of night.

To Bella the charm of the scene told nothing : she was too much interested in her investigation as to her husband's locality.

There was a deep pond in the grounds ; but that a man so luxurious, so fond of himself, so fond of warmth, ‘and so fond of *me*,’ said Bella to herself, should leave his bed, and seek a pond to drown himself, in which he would have to break the ice, she did not believe. She remained in a state of eager speculation for a few minutes, but, finding the cold likely to give her a serious chill, she was turning away, when she heard a footstep on the frosty gravel, and in another half second she saw the Major advancing through the gloom. Then Bella, running

upstairs, jumped into bed and covered herself with clothes.

The reader will probably have guessed where the Major had been, though Bella, who knew nothing of the secrets of the root-house, was much perplexed to see him enter the bedroom with a water-jug in his hand, and his night-shirt covered with the fibres of dahlia-tubers. The water-jug he placed by the side of his bed, concealed by the curtain, and then followed Bella's example, and laid himself on his pillow.

Whilst Bella speculated as to what her husband could have been doing, she dropped off to sleep. The warmth of the bed was very comforting after her shivering watch at the open door. She knew not how long she slept, but she was awakened by feeling the Major's hand on her shoulder.

'Bella, Bella, awake!' he cried. 'I am so miserable. I have been very sick, and the basin is half-full of blood!'

‘Dear me !’ said Bella, in a sleepy tone.

‘Do you think I am dying, Bella ?’

‘Dying ! of course not. I’ve heard ’tis a very healthy symptom.’

The last words were uttered dreamily, and she fell asleep again.

‘Bella, you must awake ; take that child out of the room ; I can’t have her here by the side of the bed. She says it is so chilly in the churchyard that she can’t stay there. She puts her little cold face close to mine.’

‘Nonsense, Ned ! It is only a fold of the sheet on your cheek. The night is so freezing, that all the bedclothes outside are like ice.’

He was silent for a moment, for as his wife had removed the sheet from his face his ideas wandered in a different direction.

‘Look at those cockroaches walking down the wall opposite us. Ha, ha ! Like soldiers on a march ; not our regiment, though —*we* are cavalry ; these are foot-soldiers !’

‘What stuff you talk, Major ! There are

no cockroaches here, except one or two which may have come in our trunks.'

'They are growing bigger and bigger,' cried the Major, flinging his arms round his wife's neck for protection. 'Look! look! They are swelling out into angry wild cats! How their eyes glare, and their fur stands up! Ah! they spring on the bed, one after another; they are on me now!' And he gave a frightful yell, which echoed through the whole house, and clung to Bella as if he would suffocate her.

'Don't claw my head off, Ned?' cried Bella, rather startled, and trying to shake herself free. 'There, I have driven away the cats now.'

The Major removed his arms to look, and was satisfied that the wild cats had departed.

He began again.

'Bella, I am so sick; it can't be right to vomit blood; you must give me something to stop the sickness.'

‘Really, Ned, there is no brandy in the room, and none probably in the house. I have liqueurs you may have.’

‘Nasty mawkish stuff,’ said the Major, with the irritation which persons suffering nausea feel at the offer of anything they do not fancy.

There was silence, and then the Major repeated,

‘Bella, I taste blood! I am so sick; you must stop it, or I shall die! Bella, there is whisky in a jug by the side of the bed.’

‘In a jug? Good gracious! What, in a water-jug?’

‘Yes; I can’t get it myself, my legs and arms twitch so. Give me some in a tumbler, with some water, just to allay the sickness—not enough to hurt me—I don’t want to die, you know. I’ll give up spirits entirely, and take to good wholesome beer. Let me get over this bout, and I will be so careful.’

‘Here is the jug of whisky,’ said Bella, who had got out of bed to get it, ‘and here is the tumbler.’

‘Some water, wifey—some water!’

‘Why, Major, I suppose you emptied the jug of water when you took it down to fill it with whisky.’

‘There must be water in the room—in your water-bottle.’

‘No; I used that last night, cleaning my teeth.’

‘Then go, there is a dear creature, and get some from the dressing-room.’

Bella opened the door, and returned shivering.

‘They have not brought the dressing-things and the washing-stand up from the dining-room where your bed was made.’

‘What shall I do? *Do* get me some more from your mother’s or sister’s room.’

‘I tell you that is nonsense, Ned. You had better not drink any more whisky at all.’

‘Then I shall vomit more blood, and that frightens me so.’

‘Very well,’ said Bella; ‘I shall catch my death of cold dancing about in my night-clothes. Drink it as it is.’

‘Do you think it will hurt me? I can’t bear to die, Bella!’

‘Pooh, Ned! Why should you die now more than you have done a hundred times before, when you have drunk raw spirits?’ And she filled the tumbler with whisky.

‘Not so much! not so much!’ cried the poor Major.

‘Well, put it down on the chair by your bedside; you need not drink it all at once.’

‘Ah!’ he cried, as he swallowed three-parts of the glassful, ‘how warm it seems! It stops the sickness at once. Now I’ll go to sleep.’

He lay still for a few minutes, and then cried out,

‘Bella, crush those meat-flies that are

crawling all over the bed. There are little bright-red worms, too, wriggling on the sheets, close up to my mouth. Take away the sheets, Bella ; put me into a clean bed ; I can't lie here ; let me go to the dressing-room.

‘ Well, you can go if you like ; but if you think I shall spend the night with you there, you are very much mistaken ; 'tis as cold as death, and—’

‘ Don’t talk about death !’

‘ Who said anything about death ?’

‘ Take off the sheet ; these things are crawling down my throat, and into my eyes and nose.’

Bella got out of bed unwillingly, and putting some eau-de-cologne on her handkerchief, she wiped her husband’s face and hands.

‘ Now they are all gone,’ she said in a coaxing tone. ‘ I will put the wet handkerchief over your forehead ; try to go to sleep.’

The Major lay still, and Bella went to

sleep in two minutes. She knew not how long she slept, but she was awakened by repeated jerks of the Major's arm striking at her, as she believed. She started up, and looking at him, saw what would have filled a tender heart with agony, and might appal one that was indifferent. His head was bent back, and twisted to one side; his eyes drawn up, so that they showed scarcely more than the white; his limbs and the whole trunk of his body was agitated by movements both involuntary and automatic.

'A severe convulsion fit,' said Bella. 'I sha'n't get much sleep this night; 'tis really very tiresome.'

She dipped the handkerchief in the whisky and struck him repeatedly with it on the face, ringing the bell at the same time for help. None came; she had the wrong bell-rope in her hand, which communicated with the wire downstairs. At length, finding no improvement in her husband's state, she left him;

and going to Mariana's room, awoke her, and begged her to call O'Rouke.

Mariana did so, and before O'Rouke had put on part of her wardrobe, Mariana had brought up a large can of water from the fountain in the kitchen, and had placed the foot-bath at the side of the bed; but a glimpse of its ghastly occupant turned her so sick with terror that she became faint, and staggered out of the room.

'A fine wife *you* would have made for him!' cried Bella in high disdain.—'Judy, lift the foot-bath on to the bed, that we may get his feet into it.'

Judy obeyed, with many lamentations for her poor master, who would never get over this bout, she was sure.

Ultimately the convulsed frame relaxed under the influence of the warm water, the eyes regained a look of consciousness, and the jaws ceased to clinch on the bitten tongue.

‘Judy, you must stay here for the rest of the night,’ said Bella. ‘Lie back in the easy-chair. I really must have some sleep, for the Major is wearing me to a skeleton.’

‘Sure, then, ’tis a fine fat skeleton ye are,’ said Judy, looking at the fair round arms, which were revealed fully almost to the shoulder, Bella having pushed back the lace-trimmed sleeves to avoid their dipping into the water in the foot-bath.

Bella glanced at them with a smile. Her beauty was the weapon with which she meant to open that oyster the world, and possess herself of its pearls of great price, when the Major, now drawing quick panting breath, should cease this unprofitable labour. He was tranquil for the rest of the night, and Bella slept peacefully.

CHAPTER VI.

JEALOUSY.

O'ROUKE was attracted to the side of the bed, where the jug emitted a powerful aroma of whisky. ‘Sure ’tis the crater itsel,’ said she. And she knelt down, and was about to raise the jug to her lips, when the Major opened his blood-shot eyes and looked at her. The look was a piteous one; it seemed to say, ‘Here I am lying helpless, and incapable of defending my property; and you are going to take from me what I had such trouble to bring up, and was so shivered by frost in obtaining. You take what I love best in the world.’

Judy was conscience-stricken by that look. She put down the jug hastily, and taking advantage of her reverential position, she told her beads with more rapidity than precision. ‘He’ll think I’m praying for him, and that I touched the jug by an accident, that’s all.’

The patient slept, so did Bella, so did Judy.

In the morning Judy and the Major were first awake, and he pointed to the jug and then to the tumbler. Judy, who did not wish to kill him, and saw there was no water, procured some, and gave whisky to him diluted. His head had just dropped back on his pillow after Judy had withdrawn her arm, with which it had been propped, when Bella awoke, and, turning her head, saw the Major, whom she expected to find insensible, if not dead, looking not much more blear-eyed and debauched than usual. ‘That man has a constitution of iron,’ was her mental remark; ‘more lives than a cat, it is my belief.’

‘O’Rouke, do light the fire !’

Judy went to procure newspaper and sticks, and returned with letters, which she took to Bella. This subtle lady turned towards her husband, to see if he was observing what took place in the room; but his heavy lids had sunk again over their hot eye-balls. So the wife read the contents of one which interested her in particular; for the writer was very young, very simple, very devoted, and very rich. She had just come to the signature, when a voice close to her said hoarsely, ‘Who wrote that? whose letter is it?’

She started, but answered promptly, ‘Bills, Major, bills,’ in as tranquil a tone as she could command on a short notice, crumpling the precious paper in her hand. She had the substance, but had forgotten the half-sheet which had enclosed it, which had a large coat-of-arms, after the fashion of the day, as big as a five-shilling piece. (Envelopes—those coverings which make the con-

tents of letters so charmingly accessible to dishonourable folks—were not then known ; or rather, had been known and forgotten. I gather this from those represented in old Dutch paintings, which, though larger, resembled in shape the covers used in the present day.)

‘Whose cover is that?’ inquired the Major with extraordinary distinctness. ‘I see by the seal ’tis not a bill ; those are wafered.’

The Major had often been distracted by jealousy of his beautiful wife on former occasions.

‘O, tis a card of invitation to a ball, to be given on the last day of the old year by his Majesty’s —th regiment,’ said Bella.

‘Show it to me,’ said Major O’Connor.

‘Twill only try your eyes, Ned. I’ve lost it in the bed somewhere ; we shall find it when ’tis made.’

‘Bella, that is a lie !’ said the irritated husband. ‘Show me the letter, or—’

The threat became inarticulate on the tongue, which refused to convey the impressions of the mind. Again the head was twisted awry, the eyes retroverted, the body made rigid. The agitation had produced a return of the convulsions.

'O Jesu, ye've kilt him entirely,' said Judy, 'with yer letters and yer lies?' as she dashed water on his face.

'Gently!' cried Bella. 'The bed will be soaked with wet.'

'What matters the bed, when the master's a-dying?' said the indignant Irishwoman.

But he did not die. The fit was of shorter duration than the others, though it left his mind more weakened and confused; his sight was dimmer, his hearing less acute. Violent retching ensued, and he turned with loathing from whisky, brandy, or rum, each of which was offered to him in turn. He spoke no more, but showed that feeling still held sway in his perturbed mind by the look of horror

and aversion with which he regarded Bella, and shrank from her touch when she approached him. Mariana, with her faultless purity of dress, came—stifling her natural terror and repugnance—when she had herself breakfasted, to allow Bella to dress and partake of that which Mrs. Selwyn had prepared for her younger daughter. Mariana watched the patient with the anxiety which is felt by all tender-hearted women unfamiliar with the duties of a nurse. There was a cup of milk in the room, and the Major pointed to it.

‘Give him the milk,’ said Bella shortly, O’Rouke being in the act of lacing her stays.

‘I’ll get some from downstairs,’ said the sister-in-law.

‘Nonsense; give him that.’

‘No, I cannot; there is dust on the thin layer of cream on the top; ’tis not fit for him to drink.’

The Major followed the movements of Mariana with his eyes. He had understood all the discussion. The elder sister brought some fresh milk; but though the patient tried to swallow some, he was unable, and with a spasmodic jerk he flung the glass out of Mariana's hands. He lay back for half an hour, and breathed stertorously.

CHAPTER VII.

‘A DEAD VOID.’

‘BELLA, let me send for Doctor Fox,’ murmured Mariana in a low voice. ‘I think the Major is much worse.’

‘You may, if you like; but ’tis no good,’ said Bella in her usual clear voice. ‘He is dying, and is sure to die, doctor or no doctor.’

Her husband turned a look of horror and agony on the unfeeling woman, who had so ruthlessly pronounced the doom he shrank from. The paroxysm returned, then subsided again; but the purple flush did not again depart from the face.

Mariana shrank away from the death-chamber, but returned to it, under the influence of that terrible fascination which

makes it easier to be present in a scene of horror than to stay away and imagine it in the distance. She had not been absent more than an hour, and when she went again into the bedroom, Bella was sitting near the window, the curtain of which was partially drawn back, admitting a stream of light, which fell on her head of golden hair, on her black dress, and on the folds of a gorgeous amber satin, from which she was unripping some valuable old point-lace. The same morning light, in prolonged rays, fell with fainter glory on the recesses of the bed and on its terrible inmate. The Major's eyes were turned pleadingly on his wife, and his dry lips strove to articulate 'Water!'

'Bella, he is thirsty,' said Mariana.

'Look here, Mariana; did you ever see such valuable lace? Such a bargain! only three guineas a yard; it is worth five.'

'But, Bella, he's thirsty; he says something like "Water."'

'Stuff and nonsense!' replied the sister; 'I gave him some ten minutes ago. Mamma used to have some of that lace.'

'Do, then, let me give him some!'

'You are very rude not to attend to what I am saying!—Just as you like; but you can't know anything about it, an—unmarried woman like you' (old maid, she had been going to say). 'You will probably choke him, if you try.'

The Major felt that isolation from human interests and human love which sometimes crushes the heart of the sick, who cannot move from the drear domain of their bed, and have no voice to command attention. His slow-moving eyes fell on Mariana, who could not resist the mute appeal which the look seemed to convey.

She left the room, and ran to the well, from which she obtained some recently-drawn water, fresh and tempting, and unlike that in the sick-room, which had gathered all the

impurities of the night on its surface ; then, raising the Major's head on her arm, she held the cool fluid to his lips. She fancied that he swallowed some ; but his eyes had lost their look of recognition.

'Dear me !' cried Bella, turning her head, ' how tender we are !

'On revient toujours
A ses premières amours,'

she sang mockingly.

Mariana flushed, but said steadily, ' If you would be more comfortable in the dressing-room, where the light is stronger, I will stay with him.'

' Well, yes, I will go ; he won't want anything ; you can call me if he does.'

His speech returned, but gave utterance to unintelligible mutterings. He sank down lower in the bed. O'Rouke got hot bricks rolled in flannel for his feet, but they refused to receive the applied warmth. Filled with dismay, the gentle sister-in-law watched the

wrestling of the strong man with death. She was alone with him now. There was no longer any terror of the helpless creature, whose breath came at longer intervals.

Bella looked into the bedroom once; then putting her handkerchief to her eyes, she retired again to the dressing-room, where her grief appeared to take a very active form, for she seemed to be moving about and opening and shutting boxes continually. She had fastened both doors, so that the sounds came but faintly to the sick-room.

Mariana had found Mrs. Selwyn too ill to rise that morning, when, as she had not appeared at eight o'clock to read prayers, she had sought her mother in her room. She was subject to severe headaches, and when under their influence could neither bear light nor sound; she was helpless as to herself, and unable to aid Mariana.

There was, indeed, nothing to be done in the sick-room. He was dying; and she who

had loved him so tenderly in her youth, now in her matured womanhood was watching his death-bed. She looked on the frail body over which Death was gaining his slow victory, and wondered whether in that terrible strife his soul was conscious of its peril. To Mariana it seemed as if he were dragged to the edge of a dark precipice, down which he must fall and continue to fall in giddy blackness.

The day was gloomy, for drizzling rain had succeeded the frost; but even the dim light was nearly excluded by the drawn curtains; for Mariana had feared that the light would affect him with the degree of pain which its rays produced upon her mother. In this she was wrong, for sufferers from such causes are, for the most part, unaffected by light or sound.

Mariana had thus deprived herself of the comfort of an occupation, and could speculate on the contrast between the distant sounds of

life and human occupation and the state of him to whom time would soon be no more. She heard the preparations for dinner going on ; the handle of the well turning round as James was going to water the horses ; then a cow-boy passed along the park whistling ‘Blushing Bell’ as the herd proceeded to the pond to drink. She heard a low whine outside the door, and opening it softly she saw her dog, who begged piteously to be taken up into her arms. The animal could not understand this prolonged separation from his mistress. She was glad to have his company and his sympathy, and placed him in her lap ; but he turned and uttered a low growl of terror when he looked at the bed. He had no love for its occupant, having often been subjected to stray kicks from the Major’s boots when neither Mariana nor Mrs. Selwyn was present. His enemy was now laid low, but he looked too uncanny and fearful a spectacle to be regarded by doggish senses

without expressed horror. Mariana kissed and patted him, and he buried his nose in the bend of her arm, too faithful to follow his instinct and fly from the room when his dear mistress held her melancholy post by the death-bed.

From time to time Mariana passed a feather dipped in water over the blackened lips and dried-up tongue of the dying man. He might or might not receive relief from it, but she could not bear to deprive him of the possible comfort. She thought of the rich man being in torments and begging for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue, and hoped that the story had been meant allegorically. She could not bear to believe that such tortures could exist beyond the grave.

Now she listened, for she could not hear any breathing; it had been stopping and returning for a time which seemed to her endless.

‘O gracious Power, grant that he may end peacefully at the last!’ prayed Mariana, who dreaded to witness the final struggle.

It was twilight now, and the recess of the heavily-curtained bed was lost in shadow. She held her breath to listen. There was one loud and sudden cry, as if a lifetime of terror and agony were comprised in that utterance; such as might have been given by one who, standing on the edge of a volcanic crater, loses his footing, and feels that he is falling over the brink. This cry, so fearful and unnatural, echoed through the house. Mrs. Selwyn tottered from her bed; O’Rouke rushed up from the kitchen; Bella unlocked the door of the dressing-room, and looked in with reluctant terror. O’Rouke had in her hand a lighted candle, which she held towards the face of the sick man.

‘He is gone!’ she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE LINGERS LONGER THAN HOPE.

BELLA was, her mother declared, stupefied by grief. She certainly did not exert herself to display many signs of anguish.

‘Poor thing! she will suffer dreadfully when the first shock is over,’ her mother said to Mariana, who loved her parent too well to contradict her, though she had her own convictions on the subject.

The person most demonstrative was Judy; and probably she was the one who most grieved for the death of her master.

Mrs. Selwyn knew that, though he had been neither respectable nor respected, though he had wasted his substance in riotous living, yet he was the bread-winner; and what was

to become of Bella and those two dreadful children? Mrs. Selwyn had entreated the wife of a neighbouring farmer to take the boy and girl for the day; for she had dreaded the noise they usually made, both for the dying man's sake and her own.

Mariana had much of the same feeling, and suffered more poignant anguish at the thought; for was not Bella, with this dreadful multiplication of herself, a fixture now for ever in their quiet home?

'I was a fool to think home dull, when I lived with my mother alone,' she often thought. 'Now, as it were to punish my discontent, those peaceful tranquil hours are ended. And then, how can my mother be so fond of that unprincipled Bella! It is an infatuation which makes her forget all principles of justice and equity.'

Mrs. Selwyn did not forget them, however; and the deficiencies which on these subjects she perceived in her darling Bella can only

be described by the feelings of a very clean person placed in juxtaposition with one who is beloved, but excessively dirty, and who is so indifferent to the pollution that he does not care to wash himself clean. There is the love for the object warring against the disgust felt for his habits. There is but one relation in whom affection, under these circumstances, ever survives for any long period. Maternal love lingers, when a father, who begins by thinking that the boy's debts are but the carelessness of youth, and the youth's bills but what any young man might incur, and turn out a steady fellow after all, in time, if he were but helped out of them, yet is conscious of a growing feeling of dislike to the hopeful who is fast becoming the hopeless, and a disgusting repugnance to open letters which will probably contain a demand for money, or indicate the necessity that some 'unknown quantity' should be disbursed. But the mother still

loves, and watches, and waits. Her ear is attentive to catch the uncertain step under the window when night verges on day, and her feet are swift and silent as they start down to admit the ungracious truant.

Mrs. Selwyn, notwithstanding her experience and quick perception of character, was so blinded by her partiality for Bella, that she never could perceive how futile were her gentle efforts to wash a blackamoor white. If darling Bella knew how wrong it was to run up bills that she could not pay, darling Bella would not do it. So she was for ever insisting by precept, and carrying out by practice, that people should ‘owe no man anything;’ whilst Bella sometimes smiled sweetly and assented, and sometimes politely put her fair fingers over her face to conceal a yawn. She agreed fully with her mother, she said. In theory their unanimity was wonderful; but when Mrs. Selwyn had looked grave and remonstrated at seeing Bella select-

ing cambric handkerchiefs at seven and six-pence each, and proceeding to order three dozen, Bella demonstrated clearly that pocket-handkerchiefs at six shillings each, of which some had been brought for choice, would infallibly take the skin from her nose the first time she used them, and that three dozen was but half the number she was in the habit of ordering in India. Mrs. Selwyn, returning to the charge, said that India and England were not identical; that thirteen pounds ten shillings was rather a large sum to expend on handkerchiefs, and that one dozen would be more easily paid for than three; so, in deference to her mother's prejudices, she changed the order to one dozen, and in compliance with her own will re-wrote the order for three dozen as it had originally been given. Of these the bill came in to Mrs. Selwyn in due time, for Bella argued that of course her mother was bound to pay for her own daughter's clothing.

Bella did not know, and did not care to know, that Mariana paid her mother every farthing that she cost Mrs. Selwyn ; that if she took a pair of gloves from her mother on any sudden necessity, their price was accurately counted into her mother's hand ; and that many trifling delicacies—a penny muffin or a quarter of a pound of fresh butter—were purchased by Mariana for her mother, who accepted the small gifts and shared them with the donor, with the conviction that Mariana would never have expended the money for them had she not been able to pay for them on the spot, and without incurring other debts to obtain them.

Mrs. Selwyn, depressed and suffering, went back to her bed, saying to Mariana :

‘I am so ill and helpless, my dear. I hope I may be better to-morrow. In the mean time, you had better speak to Bella about the funeral. I should like it as soon as she will permit. You had better write to

the man at Exeter; I forget his name. Of course, it will be a plain funeral, and as inexpensive as possible.' With these last words she laid her aching head on her pillow.

'Expense! expense! Mamma is always crying out about expense,' cried Bella. 'It makes me sick. Really, I believe she would grudge my poor Ned a decent sepulture.'

To this the elder sister answered nothing; but shortly after she asked whether the Major had left any will.

Bella laughed scornfully.

'What had my poor dear husband to leave, truly?—a well-smoked pipe-bowl to me; a pair of overalls to Ned; and his patent-leather boots to Julietta. It would hardly pay to administer to such a will.'

'I did not know,' said Mariana, disconcerted.

'No; how should you know anything, when you have lived all your life shut up in this poky place?'

To Mariana's astonishment, Bella was as eager to have her husband buried, or more so than either Mrs. Selwyn or her elder daughter could be.

"Tis no use to let him lie there when he must be buried some time or other,' said the philosophical lady; 'and, you see, he quite spoils my comfort by taking up my bedroom.'

'This,' thought Mariana, 'is the terrible grief that my mother predicted.' However, she acted on it, and advised Bella to order the coffin and the funeral paraphernalia to be ready in five days from that time.

'You cannot expect *me*, the widow, to write notes to these men, Mariana.'

'But you must have done it yourself, had neither my mother nor myself been in the way.'

'No, I should not,' said the superb Bella. 'I should have had many friends at the camp, had I not been mewed up in this dull

hole of a place ; living with your mamma here, I have lost many opportunities both for myself and my children.'

Mariana was about to entreat her younger sister not to continue to immure herself at the Aspens for their sake ; but she reflected that the late unhappy occupant of Bella's bed was not yet cold, and that it was too soon to utter taunting words to a widow, even if she so much deserved them.

As Bella retired to the seclusion of the dressing-room, after ordering a meat-tea for herself in half an hour's time, Mariana procured some tea at once, and took a cup of it to her mother's bedside. Then she laid her weary head on the pillow near Mrs. Selwyn's, and enjoyed the comfort of a few minutes' sleep. It was a consolation to think that she could not have to go over again, on waking, the terrible events of the last eight-and-forty hours. She sat and slept till Mrs. Selwyn put her hand out, and, touching her, found

she was cold. Then Mariana aroused herself, feeling ashamed, and assisted Mary in making her mother's bed.

'Does poor Bella seem composed, Mariana?' asked the mother in a whisper.

'Quite tranquil, my mother.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Selwyn, 'she has an angelic disposition; she is so sweet-tempered. She must be wonderfully supported. Can she bear to talk of the funeral?'

'Yes,' said Mariana; 'she has fixed it for Friday next.'

'Poor dear child!' cried the mother, filled with tender pity. "'Tis the bitterest trial that any woman can be called on to bear.'

Mariana was silent, wondering what the trial could be of losing a bad husband, and speculating whether her mother had not found the life of Bella a greater trial than the death of a bad husband. But she would not express dissent; for Mrs. Selwyn looked very ill, and seemed unwilling to rise, which, for a person

of her active habits, was in itself indicative of illness.

Poor Mrs. Selwyn did not rally on the following day. The headache continued. Her tongue and pulse announced the presence of fever—low fever; Mr. Jackson said—to whom Mariana had applied in dismay when he called as usual, not knowing of the Major's death—she must be kept perfectly quiet, and have no worry or anxiety.

CHAPTER IX.

A MOURNING OSTENTATION.

BELLA, who had not chosen to give the order for her husband's funeral, from an idea that if it was directed by Mrs. Selwyn or Mariana she should not be obliged to pay for it, interfered with what had been already done, and ordered one abounding with mourning silk and crape. It was a puzzle to know who was to attend in the mourning coaches ; Ned, as chief mourner, in one carriage, Bella supposed ; and the physician and apothecary in another.

Her mother could no longer lift her heavy head from her pillow, and lay still with half-closed eyelids, which rebelled at the painful effort to close them. She was solely occupied

by her bodily suffering, and was happily unconscious of the pile of bills which formed an increasing heap on the library-table. There, too, reposed the bank-book, concealed by suspicious-looking letters of unusual elongation, and of a cold blue tint. Mrs. Selwyn had never had such within her house since she had been left sole mistress of the mansion and of her small income.

The unhappy Major was buried and forgotten, except by his children, one of whom, the boy, took possession of his walking-stick and hookah, and Julietta of his signet-ring. Bella, however, had no idea that the hookah, which was a valuable one, richly mounted in gold, should be inherited by Ned. She dealt him a sound box on the ear, and, before he had recovered from the ringing in his head in which it had resulted, she had repossessed herself of the pipe. She cleaned this carefully, and wrapped it up in paper as a present to her new love.

‘Poor Major!’ said she, looking at it tenderly. ‘It will always be a comfort to me to know that I got him that hundred pounds from the bank, so that he could hold up his head with the best of them at the mess. Poor dear fellow! I am glad he was proud and jolly up to the last. He *must* have died soon, any way; and he could not have gone at a better time for me. It would have been really intolerable for him to have recovered just at the last. No one can say that I was not a tender and devoted wife. I undid those wretched cords, too, with which they tortured him; in fact, I was a perfect angel to him.’

In the mean time, Mrs. Selwyn tossed on her restless bed when the fever was present, and lay still when the paroxysm was over. Mariana looked at the face so tenderly beloved, which was furrowed even beyond the period of her years by the troubles through which she had passed, and heard the faint

mutterings of her delirium with such a sinking of the heart as might the shipwrecked seaman who stands on the desert rock and watches the raft, his only chance of safety, broken to pieces by the waves.

‘We can do nothing; the fever will have its way,’ Mr. Jackson had said. ‘The house must be kept perfectly quiet; any noise will much increase the suffering of the patient.’

No representations, however, could induce Ned and Julietta to refrain from jumping down the stairs two feet at once, or playing horses through the galleries.

Mariana went to Bella one day, and insisted on her making some arrangement for their being sent out of the house—at any event, till Mrs. Selwyn should recover. Mariana said the last few words in an hysterical tone; for she doubted her mother’s ever recovering.

Bella thought for a moment, and then said: ‘If mamma lives, no doubt she will wish to

give my poor children the advantages of a good education ; if she dies, Mariana, you will, of course, educate them yourself, or pay for their schooling. It seems to me that it is the only way in which a maiden aunt can be of any use in the world.'

Mariana repressed the indignation which rose to her lips, and thought of the wise injunction, 'Answer not a fool according to his folly.'

'It seems to me,' she said with a smile, which had in it a certain amount of irony, 'that it is most incumbent on the person who brought them into the world to see that they are properly cared for.'

'Of course they have a claim on their grandmother,' said Bella loftily ; 'especially as mamma, having killed my darling Elia, is bound to *try* to do her duty double to the other two children. Mamma's life must be a short one, at her age ; and, with all her screwings and pinchings, she must have

saved money, which she will naturally wish to leave to my children; consequently it must be a matter of indifference whether she spends it on them during her lifetime, or bequeaths it to them after her death.'

Mariana was silent, from anger at her sister's oblivion of *her* necessities. 'Bella,' said she mentally, 'is not only selfish, but ill-bred. It is true that none can be really well-bred but those who are free from selfishness. If you abide by the precepts of the Gospel — in honour preferring one another in your heart of hearts—you will not evince any self-love in your conduct. But selfishness is like a scarlet petticoat covered by an upper dress of the quiet colouring of politeness. 'Tis very decorous and charming when undisturbed, but the slightest puff of wind or accidental displacement, and the trenchant colour is revealed. Now Bella does not take the trouble of concealing this underclothing when with her own family,

but shows it in all its ugliness.' These were Mariana's thoughts; but she said only that the children *must* be removed. Bella had better try to get some one in Exeter to take charge of them. It might be difficult in the Christmas holidays to place them in schools.

Very well; she would see about it, she said; and she ordered the carriage to go to Exeter, which she had done every day since the Major had been buried; a circumstance which made James rebellious, for Bella had not given those reasonable and ungrasping servants a second suit of mourning, nor any compensating sum of money, which they agreed in the servants' hall it would have been 'the genteel thing to do.' This inclined them to think that it was the deceased Major who was the real gentleman after all, and that Mrs. O'Connor had inherited 'some of mistress's screwing ways.'

Bella took the children with her, and, remaining absent all day, returned in the evening without them. The release was so delightful, for quiet now pervaded the house; and Mariana hoped they might never return to it. That, however, was much too good to expect. Mariana dared not ask where they had been placed; and, like travellers in snow-covered mountains, she almost dreaded to breathe a word on the subject, lest an avalanche of wrath should fall on her head from Bella's tongue. Wherever they were, she felt they were rods put in pickle for the future castigation of her mother and herself.

CHAPTER X.

A DAWN OF HOPE.

AT the end of three weary weeks, Mrs. Selwyn, who had become more and more exhausted by the continuance of the fever, was lying on her pillow, having sunk down low in the bed, when she opened her eyes, and Mariana saw that she was conscious of her daughter's identity. At the same time she felt guilty of having allowed a small cranny of light to gleam through the window-curtains, and hastened to close it. The mother's lips moved, and her daughter caught the sense of the words, 'Draw them back.' She obeyed, and Mrs. Selwyn looked out on the clear cold light of a winter's

day; on the frozen lake, the discontented and astonished water-birds, who did not admire the unusual solidity of their natural element; on the farmer's horse-man, with his pickaxe breaking the ice for the benefit of the expectant horses—the steady old staggers only winking at the stroke of the axe, whilst the colts kicked up their heels and galloped away, half returning to look, with pricked-up ears, at the efforts made to relieve their thirst. She saw the leafless branches glittering with rime as the sun struck on them through the gleaming mist, and the spiked reeds like lances tipped with silver. Thick masses of vapour rolled away in the distance, bits of blue sky rejoiced the face of heaven, and the sick woman's sad lips relaxed into a wan smile. Then she closed her eyes again, and motioned to have the curtains replaced. Mariana lifted her head, and gave her a few spoonfuls of broth.

'Mother, you are better?' And Mrs. Selwyn gave a faint token of assent. Her recovery had commenced. She felt renewed pleasure in life, which had seemed so weary and anxious before her illness. The old father of Admetus, when entreated by his son to die for him, says truly enough that their small span of life is as dear or dearer to the aged as are the abundance of days promised by hope to the young.

To Mrs. Selwyn's enfeebled intellects recent images did not present themselves. She had forgotten the devastating incursion from India, and her memory returned only to the tranquil days she had formerly spent with Mariana. She slept much, taking small quantities of nourishment from the hand of her eldest daughter when waking, and lay painless, and not without a certain amount of comfortable languor. With renewed health, however, came her renewed spirit of activity. Thought returned, and

brought with it pain. The electric chain of memory was touched by a trivial object.

‘What is that?’ she said, looking doubtfully at something speckled and glittering which lay on her bed.

It was an Indian card-case—one of those oblong mixtures of silver or lead and ivory, which, though artfully inlaid, produce a mean pepper-and-salt appearance—bordered by ivory.

‘Tis Bella’s card-case. She left it there when she came in to ask, “Is anything more required excepting the arrowroot, to purchase which I am going to Exeter ?”’

This was, Mariana thought, the most agreeable way of putting it. The strict truth would have been, that Bella was going for her own pleasure, and had expressed various little exclamations of impatience when her sister begged her not to forget the arrowroot. She went for a pencil to write down

the commission, and, not returning to the room, had forgotten the card-case.

Mrs. Selwyn's face had become troubled, for with Bella's name came a long string of anxieties connected with her.

'Where are the children? Where is the Major?' she said in a faint voice.

Mariana's heart sank within her. Had her mother lost her intellects or her memory, that raw material from which all intellect seems spun?

'The children are out for the day, my dear mother. Had you not better try to compose yourself?'

'I am composed, my dear,' replied Mrs. Selwyn quietly. 'I begin to remember now the poor Major and dearest Bella's loss. How thin!' she said, lifting her skeleton hand. 'Have I been ill long?'

'Yes; three weeks.'

A shade of trouble passed over the pale face.

'Has Mr. Jackson been here often?
There will be a dreadful bill.'

'O, mother!' cried Mariana in a tremulous voice, 'to have you restored to health has been the one subject of my daily and nightly prayers; and now that I see you conscious, though wasted and feeble, I am too happy to think of bills. Pray do not think of them yourself. To-morrow is Sunday, and we will pass it in prayers for the perfect restoration of your strength and thanksgivings for the boon of your prolonged life, which ten days ago I dared scarcely hope for.'

The mother put her fragile-looking fingers into the eager grasp of her daughter, and bowed her head in token of assent.

The next day, when the bells of the village-church were clanging their summons to divine service, Bella swept into her mother's bedroom, her prayer-book in her hand —a bright bit of scarlet and gold telling on

the rayless folds of crape and bombazeen—and bending over Mrs. Selwyn's bed, she kissed her, with a good-morning and good-bye at the same moment. Her mother looked at her with a mixture of pain and admiration. How faultlessly beautiful was that face in features and complexion! and how exquisitely tender and loving was its expression!

'I am glad she is going to church,' said the mother, in a tone of satisfaction.

Innocent Mrs. Selwyn did not know that Bella was an actress so accomplished, that she longed for a theatre in which to display her attractions every day during the week—not excepting the seventh day. She looked so exquisitely lovely as she walked up the aisle to her mother's pew; so touchingly beautiful in her widow's weeds—she had a look so unconscious of the admiration she excited, and a seeming bashfulness which pleaded for escape from the scrutiny

her charms invited, that the coldest were captivated before they were aware; and the men at least could only deem her faultless. The women hated her in their hearts, but knew not what fault to find. They could only say that Mrs. O'Connor was not one of *their* beauties, though the gentlemen cried her up so.

Bella would have preferred attending the cathedral service at Exeter; but she found James was decided in not taking out his horses on the Sabbath-day. Bella tried to induce Mariana to order him to go; but the elder sister steadily refused.

Had he consented, she said, she must have interfered to forbid what her mother would have considered such a desecration of the Sabbath.

So Bella was compelled to be content with a smaller theatre of action. Anything was better than the dreary propriety of the Aspens. She well remembered those pro-

perly-spent Sundays during the holidays : the commonplace-book into which passages from Blair's sermons had to be written in a large text-hand ; the collect of the day having to be learnt, and a portion of the psalms ; the sermon read by her mother in the evening ; and the recreation of studying Miss Hannah More's *Practical Piety*, or, by a great stretch of indulgence, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, when all the heaviest work of holiness was overpast. A 'tyranny,' Bella used to call it, quoting,

‘Until this tyranny be overpast.’

Mariana, gentle creature, was wont to learn all the catechism, collects, and psalms so assiduously, that at last she knew and could repeat them on their appointed days without any effort. Bella declared that she could not understand many of the collects, nor remember any ; and that as to the part of the catechism beginning, ‘How many sacraments ?’ &c., she did not believe that the

reverend fathers who drew it up understood it clearly themselves.

After Mrs. Selwyn had expended an unprecedented amount of sugar-plums in trying vainly to coax the naughty girl to commit the words to memory, Bella, whose contumacy was secretly encouraged by her sarcastic father rejoicing in the discomfiture of his wife, received more indulgences from him for evading than for performing her mother's request.

Mrs. Selwyn comforted herself by the conviction that poor Bella's memory was faulty, and not her heart. She supposed that it was a compensation to Mariana that, though less beautiful, she was more intellectual. (N.B. Maternal love has a thicker bandage even than 'love, that source of fond desire.') Mariana was not gifted with Bella's intelligence; but she had enough to guide her through life as a well-principled and virtuous woman.

When the psalmody commenced at church, Bella's triumph was at its height. Then her uplifted face, heavenly blue eyes, and gently parted lips were seen to the greatest advantage as they gave utterance to

‘The long resounding voice oft breaking clear
In solemn pauses from the swelling base.’

Her voice was very full and rich in its tones, and being capable of long sustentation of notes, was particularly adapted for sacred melodies.

When she returned from the afternoon service, she made herself especially charming to her mother; sitting by her side at their tea-time, taking care that she had a hot bottle on the sofa at her feet, and assiduously guarding her eyes from the glare of the wintry setting sun.

Mariana looked on in wonder. She knew Bella to be one of those ladies who could not

‘Take her tea without a stratagem.’

But she was not jealous; for she knew it would not last, and that Monday morning would find her on her way to Exeter again.

'I did not see you yesterday, Bella; only the card-case you left on my bed when I was asleep.'

'Ah, darling mamma! my dear Mrs. Herbert, the wife of one of the officers who was poor Edward's bosom friend, is at the point of death. As soon as I found from Jackson that you were out of danger, I hurried over to her, and have spent many hours with her every day since. I was there till late last evening, as she seemed worse; and if you can spare me the carriage, I shall be anxious to be at her bedside early to-morrow.'

'What a kind heart you have, dear child!' said the mother, looking admiringly at her daughter. 'So thoughtful of others! putting aside the remembrance of your own deep

grieves as a wife and mother to minister to a sick friend.'

'O, mamma! if I have any good in my composition,' said Bella disclaimingly, 'I owe it to you.'

Mariana thought in her heart that, judging from the amount inherited by Bella, she had not much for which to be grateful; but she concealed her feelings by something between a 'h'm!' and a groan.

CHAPTER XI.

FRESH TROUBLES.

BELLA had passed her days, most of them, at the lodgings of a Mrs. Herbert, the wife of one of the officers, where ‘in a friendly way’ she met those whom she desired to see without mixing in general society, which might be deemed, from her recent losses, to be indecorous.

Bella’s nervous susceptibilities had not, however, been called into play by her friend’s ill-health, Mrs. Herbert being perfectly well and in excellent spirits. Of this fact Bella knew full well that the seclusion in which her mother and sister lived would keep them in ignorance.

Poor Mrs. Selwyn went to sleep that night with a troubled mind. She loved Bella; but Bella with two servants and two children she could not keep at her present rate of living. She could not see what was to be done, and her brain, still feeble, refused to take note of all the circumstances of the case. She sank to sleep in a state of miserable bewilderment.

The next day she was stronger, having been refreshed by a good night's rest.

She made Mary dress and place her on the sofa, by way of a pleasant surprise to Mariana. She wished she could have made breakfast, and ordered the servant to bring to her any letters which might have arrived during her illness.

Mary, like Cowper's postman, unconscious what she brings, knew not what pain she was conveying to her unhappy mistress, but deposited an apron full of long blue-looking letters from her lap on to the sofa, and, half

hidden by the unwelcome shower, fell the bank-book in the midst.

'Thank you; that will do, Mary. Now bring up my cup of tea when Miss Selwyn shall have made it, and I shall not want anything more,' said the poor lady in a faint voice; for the sight of that pale-blue oblong heap gave her a sickening remembrance of great trouble.

She flung the corner of her shawl over the obnoxious occupants of her sofa on hearing Mariana's step, who entered with smiles on her face, dressed in the perfection of neatness, which added grace to her trim little figure and delicate waist. She was very happy; for her mother, whom she loved with all the deep tenderness of her nature, was getting well, and she did not anticipate that

‘joy’s rebound
Is highest from the hollowest ground,’

or that malign influences might deprive her of the life she so highly valued.

'Dear mother, you are a leetle pale and haggard,' she said. 'One must not expect too much from you, I suppose?' for Mrs. Selwyn's concealed volcano of bills had made her the colour of a corpse. 'Now drink a little tea.'

'O Mariana, there is cream in it! What extravagance!'

'Now listen to me, mother. Your life is worth everything to me. Mr. Jackson said you must get down nourishment. What can be more nourishing than cream?'

'But the butter, my dear?'

'Nonsense, mother! Bella *will* have cream both for her tea and coffee, and I don't see why you should go without.'

'Butter, my dear, is twenty-two pence per pound—at least it was when I had to buy it last; and if Bella, poor darling, can't drink her tea without cream, it must be evident to you that there will be little left for butter if we both take it.'

Mariana was provoked, but remembered that sick folks must not be argued with. She begged her mother to drink the tea at once, or it would be cold, and therefore wasted.

It looked tempting with its curling steam, and with only the few drops of water, not tea, in the saucer, which prevented the cup from slipping; for the daughter knew that a sloppy-looking cup of tea was not appetising, and had taken care to spill none.

Before the tea was finished, Mrs. Selwyn heard the carriage drive up to the door; and presently Bella, like

'gorgeous Tragedy,
With sable robe came sweeping by,'

and bade her mother farewell.

'But, my dear, you have not had your breakfast.'

'O yes, dear mamma; I swallowed a cupful of tea' (this was true, for she had cooled it with an extra allowance of the precious

cream); ‘and I shall have a little arrowroot’ (*sub auditu*, ‘muffins and chocolate’), ‘at eleven o’clock, with Mrs. Herbert.’

She was gone, and her fond mother looked after her with a troubled smile; the smile was a tribute to her loveliness, the trouble to the thought of the expenses connected with her and her children.

Monday morning brought its usual round of duties to Mariana, which had been doubled since the illness of her mother. She necessarily left Mrs. Selwyn alone after she had placed some books within her reach.

‘A pen and ink too, dear,’ the old lady pleaded; and the smiling daughter, unconscious for what they might be required, placed them and the writing-book by her side before she left the room.

Then, with a sinking heart, the mother opened the first uncanny-looking epistle. It was written in a fine clear hand, and made out from Thomas Gordon, confectioner,

to Mrs. Selwyn, the Aspens. Eight pounds of grapes, three pounds four shillings; five dozen of medlars, one shilling per dozen, eaten and destroyed in the shop; three pineapples ditto, one pound fifteen shillings each. She looked at the date. Was she in her senses? It could not be meant for her: some other Mrs. Selwyn perhaps. O, it must be a mistake. She had never dealt at Gordon's in her life—no, that was wrong; not since Mr. Selwyn's death, she meant—because she found his charges so exorbitant.

Another which she opened, having put aside the fruiterer's with the comforting idea that it was a mistake, was a charge for a young lady's hat (thirty-six shillings), and various other articles, such as lace, gloves, fans, and feathers.

'Either I am gone mad, or the tradesfolk are,' said the poor lady.

Then she read the description of the young lady's hat, which was of black chip, lined

and trimmed with pink satin, and a large ostrich feather, at two guineas, making it amount to three pounds nineteen shillings. She laid the bill on her lap in astonishment, which would have been ludicrous had it not been so painful to her.

‘Three pounds nineteen shillings!’ she repeated,—‘another mistake.’ Then a dim remembrance flitted across her of having seen Julietta in a strangely-vivid head-gear of pink and black, as she passed the open door of Elia’s bedroom the day before that poor child’s death.

‘It must have been bought for Julietta,’ she said, with a sinking heart. ‘How *dared* they put it down to me?’

The next bill she opened was a haberdasher’s, the amount being considerably over two hundred and fifty pounds; for this gentleman supplied funerals, and did a little in the tailoring business. The account comprised Elia’s and the Major’s funeral ex-

penses, with the mourning for Bella, her children, and the servants.

‘Good heavens!’ said the poor lady, ‘what can I do? The Major, being dead, cannot be called on to pay his own funeral expenses!’

She wondered what arrears of pay might be due to him. Not much, she feared. And Bella? How could *she* pay? Of course she could not.

Unconsciously she opened another. This was from the perfumer’s. Elderwater, rose-water, macassar oil, cold cream, pearl powder, and—could she believe her eyes?—rouge. Rouge! rouge for *her*?—for her, the immaculate wife and the stainless widow! She felt herself polluted by the imputation; they might as well have called her an improper character at once.

A dreadful thought came into her mind. Could that beautiful tint on the cheek of her Bella be artificial? could the rouge have been purchased by *her*?—purchased shame-

lessly by the daughter, and attributed to the mother?

She thought of the heightened colour she had seen on Bella's face on her return from walking, and how it had faded almost into paleness when the result of the exercise had subsided, and was incredulous of the deception. The innocent old woman did not know that her skilful daughter—a true artist as regarded her own countenance—only put the most delicate of tints on her cheeks, so slight that it was dominated by accidental circumstances.

Bella could blush and turn pale, and show every variety of emotion as truly as if the delicate pale blush rose had never been applied to her smooth skin.

By whom, then, could the rouge have been purchased, and all this array of cosmetics? She would look at no more bills. Her brain, weakened by the exhaustion produced by fever, was becoming giddy. She must con-

ceal these astounding bills from Mariana. Mariana did not love Bella ; and the mother shrank from the disapprobation she should perceive in Mariana's eyes, although her eldest daughter might inflict on herself the pain and grief of keeping silent even from good, *i.e.* just, words. Besides, it would be infusing suspicion against Bella which *might* be groundless. Then, as if in a magic mirror, thoughts arranged themselves into form and shape. She saw in her mind as in a book that the fruiterer's bill was dated a day or two before Elia's illness, which had been caused by the immoderate consumption of grapes. Yes ; it had not been sent in by mistake. The Major, no doubt, had desired that the articles should be booked to her. She raged ; but what could she do against the dead ? Her head seemed whirling. The fact of debt was one that she had fought against all her life. She could be as angry as she pleased on the subject of

this bill, for Bella had not incurred it. This was a comfort, but then—the rouge ! She opened one or two more bills in desperation : one was from a shoemaker, for shoes supplied to Mrs. O'Connor, blue, pink, white, and black satin, twenty-three shillings per pair ; jean boots for Miss O'Connor, eighteen shillings, &c. &c.

Sick at heart, Mrs. Selwyn turned to her bank-book, to see what might be the balance in her favour. It could not be much, she knew, for the weekly bills of the butcher and the baker, since the arrival of the flight of locusts, had materially diminished the reserved sum of fifty pounds which had been intended for Mariana's benefit after the death of her mother. She opened the book and read the sum-total made up to the end of the year—overdrawn eighty pounds !

CHAPTER XII.

THE DARKEST HOUR.

MRS. SELWYN turned very faint. Her eyes ran over the array of figures, and at first she did not catch the appalling item, ‘Self, one hundred pounds,’ as it stood at the top of the page, carried over. At the next instant she fell back on the sofa insensible, when Mariana, coming up with the Bible and Prayer-book to read the psalms and lessons of the day, found her with the bank-book open, and surrounded by piles of bills.

Mariana used all her simple remedies to restore her mother to sensibility. When Mrs. Selwyn regained consciousness, she made a faint effort to conceal the accounts ; but she

did not care whether Mariana did or did not see the bank-book. She could not believe that Bella had anything to do with that—either she herself had been delirious when she wrote the cheque, or some one had forged it. If she had written the cheque and had cashed it, she surely would have had the money or some portion of it unspent. She took the cheques which had passed the bank out of the pocket of the book. There was the fatal one, in her own handwriting as it seemed to her—no alteration, no erasure visible.

In a faint voice she told Mariana her perplexity and distress. The clerk at the bank who had cashed it must be communicated with immediately.

Mariana, seeing how much her mother's anxiety had told on her health in the last hour and half, professed her eagerness to go at once to the bank. Mrs. Selwyn remembered with vexation that Bella had the car-

riage, but Mariana assured her that an eight miles' walk would not hurt her; she only entreated her mother not to worry or fret if she were not home till late. The clerk might not be in when she got there; in that case she should ask permission to remain in the show-room at the shop of Miss Mountste- phens. She would do her best to get at the bottom of the mystery if her mother would promise not to be anxious, and to let Mary provide her food and give her beef-tea at the proper time. Mrs. Selwyn made only one stipulation—that Mariana should have a fly to come back. It would be pitch-dark, and she should be miserable at the thought that a daughter of hers was walking along that lonely road after four o'clock in the afternoon.

Whilst she spoke, her fingers were nervously twitching in her futile attempts to conceal the bills; an unnecessary effort, for Mariana had unintentionally seen the amounts

of several whilst she was trying to recover Mrs. Selwyn from her insensibility, and had made up her mind as to an idea of her own in reference to them and other household expenses.

She summoned Mary to take her place, lest her mother should have a recurrence of her faintness, and then came in dressed for her walk with that admirable precision by which her little trim figure was so pleasantly set off. Mrs. Selwyn looked at her determined mouth, with something of hope that the mystery might be elucidated by Mariana's intervention. The poor lady was herself too much troubled and bewildered to understand very clearly all her liabilities.

There was one anxiety which surmounted all the rest, *i.e.* to find out who had presented the forged cheque; and this Mariana's visit to the bank would probably discover.

She put the pile of bills under her pillow, and resting on it her aching head, tried to

forget all other trouble in the bodily distress of a recurrence of her feverish attack.

When Mariana arrived at the bank, she was told that the young man who had cashed the cheque had gone away for a fortnight ill, and no one having been present at the transaction but the parties concerned, no information could be obtained. Mariana, unaccustomed to leave home, timid and scared, looked so much distressed, that the clerk asked if she would not like to see the senior partner of the bank.

Yes; she should be very glad to have the opportunity, she said.

And the clerk looked into an inner room, where the junior partner informed him that Mr. Hereward was gone home.

'You live at the Aspens, ma'am? You might call on your way home. He would be sure to see you if you give your name, and say that you are come on business connected with the bank.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN OF BUSINESS AT HOME.

MR. HEREWARD was known to Mariana only by name, and by the fact that he paid through his bank the interest of the small sum in Consols from which she derived her income. He was trustee for this money, the trust having devolved on the son of the original trustee, and then through one or two others, till it remained vested in Mr. Hereward, the senior partner of the Exeter Bank. Neither of the ladies at the Aspens had ever had any communication with this gentleman, either personally or by letter. The jointure was paid to Mrs. Selwyn's account in the bank-book, and Mariana received the notification of her dividends in a similar manner.

Though the ladies knew nothing of the

bankers, the bankers well knew the character and customs of the inhabitants of the Aspens. Bankers have keen perceptions as to their clients. In fact, their intuition would seem wonderful, were it not that the delicate and almost invisible network of their correspondences all over the civilised world vibrates like the circle of a spider's web, from the centre to the remotest extremity. The senior partner knew Major O'Connor to be a worthless spendthrift before the vessel which bore him and his family had touched the shores of England. He foresaw that the old widow would probably become a victim to her son-in-law's extravagance; but the thought did not disturb him, for it was no affair of his. Happily he was a bachelor, and had no sons-in-law or daughters-in-law to squander his well-earned thousands. He used to smile grimly, as he turned over in his mind how he should leave his money. No relatives had any claim on him. He had been dis-

appointed in a love affair early in life, and had kept clear of the insidious sex ever since.

This was the gentleman whom Mariana had to attack in his stronghold. She was too eager to see him to think that she outraged any laws of decorum in going to his house. She opened the large heavy gate leading through the long avenue to the lighted mansion, and trod with trembling steps over the cold crisp grass, which crackled under her feet. It was still twilight outside, though the interior of the house required illumination, and had that glow of comfort contrasting with outside gloom. She went up to the porch and rang the bell, which was immediately answered by a footman in a plain but handsome livery.

‘Is Mr. Hereward within? Will you give him my card, and say I wish to speak to him for a few minutes on a subject connected with the bank?’

The man withdrew, and returning imme-

diately, ushered Mariana into a luxurious library, where the master of the house rose from an easy-chair placed by the side of a roaring fire, and motioned Miss Selwyn to be seated in a similar one on the opposite side. He was a small man, with feet and hands of extreme delicacy, very restless hazel eyes, and soft brown wavy hair which was slightly streaked with gray.

‘Can I be of any service, madam?’ he asked, seating himself.—‘A tidy little lady,’ he thought, ‘pretty and pure looking. Dare-say she’s a fool.’

Mariana thought, ‘What a formidable person to address! Looks as if he could see through you. I don’t know how to begin!’

‘Ahem!’ said she.

He took off his glasses, which hung round his neck, and let them dangle, scrutinising her with his head thrown back, whilst he played with them in his right hand.

‘It was about a cheque, sir,’ she began in

a frightened voice; ‘a cheque for a hundred drawn by my mother, which she did not draw.’

Mr. Hereward smiled at this exordium.
A fool, evidently!

‘Are you an Irish lady, ma’am?’

‘No, sir!’ in an astonished tone.

‘Then how could your mother draw a cheque, and not draw it?’

‘I mean that the cheque is drawn in my mother’s handwriting, and she has no recollection of ever having drawn it, and certainly cannot believe she ever had any money from it.’

‘Is your mother fatuous?’

‘Fat—what?’

‘O dear! Well, madam, is Mrs. Selwyn in her right senses?’

‘My mother was perfectly sensible when I left home; but she was delirious for three weeks from fever recently.’

‘Have you got the cheque? I suppose

you mean that we have cashed a forged cheque?

Mariana produced it.

Mr. Hereward turned it about, and looked puzzled.

'Have you any other cheque about you drawn by Mrs. Selwyn?'

'No—yes, I mean. My mother gave me one for current expenses for five pounds, which I have not yet cashed. I forgot it when I was at the bank to-day.'

'Woman-like,' murmured the banker.

She produced it; and Mr. Hereward compared the two.

'Humph!' he said. 'Where does Mrs. Selwyn keep her cheque-book?'

'Locked up in her bureau.'

'Has any one access to it but herself?'

'No one. She always wears the key about her person.'

'But she has been ill?'

‘That is true; but I never left my mother day or night, and the key was in her pocket under her pillow.’

‘You have a sister, I believe—a very fine woman. Did she not take turns with you in nursing your mother?’

‘No, sir. She only came in occasionally to inquire.’

‘From what period did Mrs. Selwyn’s illness date?’

‘From Major O’Connor’s death, on the 27th of January.’

‘This cheque is dated on the 20th; consequently she was well on that day, and in full possession of her faculties.’

‘Yes.’

‘My opinion is, then, that the cheque is a forged one. Did your mother see if any blank cheque or cheques had been abstracted from the cheque-book?’

‘I do not know. O sir!’ added Mariana, breaking down and sobbing; ‘she is so ill,

so prostrated by the avalanche of bills never contracted by herself.'

'Then why the devil should she pay them?'

'O, you don't know my mother!'

'No; nor do I wish it, if she is such a fool as to be imposed upon.'

'Her notions of justice are so strict. She would probably reply, that parents are in honour bound to pay bills contracted by their children, unless they have warned their tradesmen that they will not be answerable for them.'

'Ah, well, yes, if they are under age.'

'No; at any age.'

'Then she must bear what she brings on herself by her absurd scruples.'

'They are not absurd,' said Mariana, with a flash of fire from her meek countenance. 'At least, not in my opinion,' she added more meekly, wiping her eyes.

'Well, crying about it won't mend it,'

said Mr. Hereward. ‘ You want to know whether *we* are liable if we have paid a forged cheque. To this I answer, that *we* are liable. I believe this cheque to have been forged; by whom I cannot, of course, tell. I should not have cashed it myself without inquiry, because, during all the years we have been in the habit of cashing cheques for Mrs. Selwyn, she has never presented one above thirty pounds. Of this the clerk, probably, was not aware. The cheque is cleverly forged. There are few indications of tracing in the letters; but,’ he said, taking from a drawer a glass of unusual power of magnifying, ‘ there is a slight line of blacklead pencil shining outside the flourish of the S in Selwyn. The first thing to be done is, for Mrs. Selwyn to examine her cheque-book, and see whether one or more has been extracted. Then we will try to find who the culprit may be. The young fellow is ill with brain-fever, I understand, and cannot

be spoken with at present to tell us who presented the cheque. If taken from Mrs. Selwyn's book, it must have been one of the household ; if not, it may have been forged by any of the tradesmen, who may have obtained one of our books fraudulently, and having been paid by your mother, has copied her signature, and altered the sum to a hundred pounds. Whosoever it may be,' added he, 'your mother will not lose the money; but the forger shall swing for it,' he added, with a grim look of determination.

Mariana seemed shocked. She did not rise, and Mr. Hereward looked at her and then at a timepiece on the chimney-piece. She read the look, and answered it.

'Yes, I know 'tis very late, but—'

'I am all attention.'

'Mr. Hereward, you are my trustee.'

He bowed.

'My money is all my own, I believe ?'

He bowed again.

‘It is not much, but I may do as I please with it?’

‘Certainly,’ he said gravely.

‘Then I want you to sell out five hundred pounds for me.’

‘Indeed?’

‘What my mother has is a life-income only, I believe?’

‘Only a life-income. Then perhaps you have some intention of settling in life, as it is called, and wish to give the five hundred to your future husband?’

Mariana smiled faintly. ‘I have no lover nor any husband in prospect. My mother is the only tie I have on earth. I cannot see her fretting her life away in the vexation of debt brought on her by others. She has been very ill. The piles of bills I saw round her when I left home are sufficient to upset the brain of a person in strong health, and will probably kill her, unless she

be relieved from the anxiety consequent on pecuniary embarrassment.'

'So you think yourself very grand and disinterested in sacrificing your money for your mother's peace of mind?'

'By no means,' said the lady simply. 'My sole chance of happiness depends on my mother's life. I am willing to sacrifice five hundred of my two thousand pounds for her peace and my pleasure.'

'Have you considered what is to become of you after Mrs. Selwyn's death? Probably you are highly accomplished, and mean to be a governess? You play exquisitely on the pianoforte doubtless?'

'No.'

'Then you sing divinely, and play to accompany yourself?'

'Only a few hymns and psalms in church, &c., on Sunday evening.'

'Well, but you can imitate Japan work, or do Poonah painting of smooth peaches and

woolly-looking grapes? Or you can stencil a cross, with rays around it, by the application of cards and black lead rubbed on with a brush?"

"Indeed I can do nothing of the kind," said Mariana, looking very helpless.

"Then, my dear madam, as your trustee, I advise you to keep your money. You will not have too much to live on when Mrs. Selwyn dies."

"Sir," said Mariana, "you are my trustee, and I am very ignorant about business; but it seems to me that you have no right to prevent a woman of thirty-six—"

("She looks very young for that age—not more than thirty," was Mr. Hereward's mental observation.)

"A woman of thirty-six from spending her money as she pleases. If you *can* do so, I beg you not to prevent what is no sacrifice. It would be one not to do it."

"Well, well, you shall have your own

way, if you please; I'll see about it. But let me have a look at those bills of your mother's; I suppose they were incurred by Major O'Connor or your sister. Tradesmen who expect to have to wait for their money generally take care of themselves by extortionate charges.'

'O,' cried Mariana, much relieved, 'I shall be so very thankful if you will do so!'

'And you may tell Mrs. Selwyn that the bank will be liable for the money—the hundred pounds—if their clerk has paid a forged cheque. So I trust she will be easier in her mind and rest well to-night. She is spoken of as a woman of unflinching integrity.'

'I am so much obliged to you,' said Mariana, rising with glowing cheeks at the compliment paid to her mother, and holding out her hand timidly.

The gentleman received it and bowed over it, after the fashion of Sir Charles

Grandison. ‘Allow me,’ he said, ‘to conduct you to your carriage.’

‘It is quite unnecessary,’ said Mariana uneasily. But without ringing for the footman, he conducted her to the door, and opened it himself.

‘I don’t see it. Gone round, probably.’ He placed his hand on the bell-handle, when Mariana stopped him.

‘I have no carriage; I walked. It is no distance—not more than two miles—a mere nothing.’

‘Good heavens, ma’am!’ cried the banker; ‘how exceedingly imprudent! Of course, I must walk home with you. I could not let a lady go back after dark unattended.—Four miles! I cannot be back under an hour and ten minutes, and the salmon will be spoilt,’ he thought. But he only rang the bell violently, and said to the footman, ‘Tell the cook I shall not dine till half-past six.—Now then, madam,’ he said, placing her

hand within his arm, ‘the sooner I get you home safely the better.’

He felt intensely provoked at having to take that walk, but would not listen to a word she uttered in dissuasion.

She told him that she had promised to take a hack-carriage if she were likely to be detained till it was dark. ‘I did not think,’ she said simply, ‘that I had stayed so long at your house; the time passed so swiftly.’

‘Humph!’ said Mr. Hereward, a little mollified.

The walk to the Aspens did not seem so long after all with Miss Selwyn on his arm. She conversed with intelligence and simplicity, answering honestly all the leading questions put by her shrewd companion which referred to herself or her mother. Of her sister and the deceased Major she said as little as possible, and her silence was eloquent.

She was troubled during the last ten minutes of her journey by the query in her own mind as to whether she ought to ask him to walk in on their arrival at the Aspens; but she remembered his injunction to the cook about the dinner, and saw that it would be an empty compliment. They shook hands and parted when Mariana stood at her mother's door, and she stopped him as he was about to ring the bell. ‘She may be asleep,’ she said gently. ‘Good-night, and thank you very much, Mr. Hereward.’

The gentleman, as he crushed the crisp frosty earth on his return, congratulated himself on having done a polite act, and had thereby given himself an increased appetite for his dinner. The forged cheque worried him a little. He supposed the money was not recoverable; spent, of course, by this time by the forger. It would not do to lose hundreds after this fashion; and Mr. Her-

ward consoled himself that if the firm lost the money, they should have the pleasure of hanging the culprit. He would ride over next day, and discover whether that provoking young fool with his brain-fever was sufficiently sensible to be spoken to on the subject.

When he returned to his library, he discovered something white lying on the ground close by the chair, and taking it up, he found it was a pocket-handkerchief with which Mariana had wiped her eyes when she had spoken about her mother.

‘I must take care of it, and return it. A fine thing if Sally finds a woman’s handkerchief in my library!’

Sally was an old woman of sixty-eight, who had been his nursery-maid in infancy, and did not seem to understand that their respective relations had been altered. Her every effort had been exerted to keep her master unmarried, and hitherto with such success that up

to the present time he had rejoiced in his liberty.

‘I sowed my wild oats of the folly of love before I was twenty,’ he used to say. ‘I am too wise now to put my neck under the noose. Poor thing!’ said he benevolently, as he helped himself to some fine salmon, ‘I wish she had had some of this—so creamy and so well-dressed! ’

After a dinner which he had enjoyed more than usually from the unwonted exercise which preceded it, he drank his third glass of port-wine, and composed himself to the study of his daily paper; and in speculation on the probable rise of stocks and the events of the Peninsular war, he felt no desire for any sharer in the comforts of his home.

Mariana stood silently by her mother’s sofa, who suddenly turned her keen eyes on her in an accent of inquiry.

‘Mother, I have seen the senior partner in the bank. He says no doubt the cheque was

forged, and that under those circumstances the bank must be answerable for the loss.'

'O,' cried Mrs. Selwyn, with a sigh of relief; 'but who could have been so wicked as to have forged it?'

'You must look at your cheque-book, mother, to-morrow, and see if any blank cheques have been abstracted.'

'I know they have not, my dear, because, you see, I always keep the book locked, and the key in my pocket, so I am quite easy on that score. It would be dreadful, Mariana, if I were the cause of death to any one. If the person were convicted, he would be hanged to a certainty.'

Mariana said nothing, but turned very pale.

'How pale you look, Mariana! You are chilled, poor dear. Come and warm yourself.'

'I am not cold, mother,' she replied, still shuddering; 'only, the thought of hanging

to be inflicted for the loss of a hundred pounds!"

'Yes, it seems very terrible; but the offender ought to be punished,' said Mrs. Selwyn coldly, little thinking that her darling Bella was the culprit.

Then she asked Mariana to tell her all about it, 'from the egg to the apple,' quoting unconsciously a proverb used by her late husband, which was probably derived from the Roman feasts, where the dinner began with one and ended with the other.

Mariana was glad to have something to tell by which she might amuse the invalid, and in the perfect seclusion of the women's lives small things became great in recounting.

Mariana could describe Mr. Hereward's person and manner — rather rough at first, but growing more civil by degrees—and the pattern of the carpet, and the texture of his window-curtains. She said nothing about her intention of selling out to pay that pile

of bills, the corners of which she perceived at that very moment under the end of the sofa-cushion.

‘It was quite dark when you returned—what did you pay the man for the fly? I must repay that, as it was to please me you hired it.’

Then Mariana told that Mr. Hereward had walked home with her; which set Mrs. Selwyn thinking again, and in a troubled manner, she said:

‘Mariana, I think it was improper that you should have gone to the house of a strange gentleman. He must have thought it very odd.’

‘I do not think he did, mother; and really ’tis a little too bad in you,’ she said with a sad smile, ‘to rejoice in the information I give you, and then to object to my means of obtaining it.’

Mariana could not explain one of the reasons why she had visited Mr. Hereward.

‘That is true, my dear; but it has been such a pleasure to me, that in the whole course of your life you have never acted in a way which the most rigid could condemn, I would not have Mr. Hereward, or any one else, judge you falsely.’

Mrs. Selwyn, woman-like, was busy mentally in laying the foundation of hopes and wishes relative to Mariana’s chance of matrimony. Certainly there was nothing enthusiastic in Mariana’s account of her new acquaintance; but she was a sensible woman, and having failed so egregiously in her first love-affair, would marry from prudential motives, no doubt, if she had an opportunity. The mother smiled sadly at her own castle-building. Poor Mariana never seemed to have any opportunities.

CHAPTER XIV.

REMONSTRANCES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

As Mrs. Selwyn mused, she heard a carriage drive up.

‘There is Bella, no doubt. Mariana, my dear, do you mind leaving us alone for half an hour? I must speak to Bella before I sleep.’

‘Better not, mother,’ said Mariana anxiously. ‘Do wait till to-morrow.’

‘I shall not have a wink of sleep, my dear, till I am satisfied as to some accounts that have been sent in to me.’

Mariana, hearing Bella’s step on the stairs, got up and left the room by another door. She had a terrible suspicion—not the less

terrible for being undefined—that Bella had been mixed up in some way with the forgery of the cheque. She could not go to bed without seeing her mother safely and quietly placed in hers; for though she had slept in her mother's room during the most anxious part of her illness, she had, from consideration for her mother's health, returned to her own bedchamber on her mother's recovery.

Bella came into her mother's room looking flushed and handsome, and tossing off her heavy bonnet of black crape with its widow-cap, she shook her magnificent tresses of golden hair free from the pressure made by her head-dress.

‘Mamma, there are a couple of fine oranges for you! I took them from a plateful brought for Mrs. Herbert. They are beauties. Shall I peel one?’

‘O, thank you, my darling!’ said the fond mother, touched by the tender thoughtful

ness of her youngest child, which, being unusual, was more valued. ‘Do not peel one; you may squirt some of the juice over your black dress; but ’twas very kind of you to think of me when you were nursing your poor friend.’

Bella smiled sweetly. Any one more suspicious might have seen a latent meaning in that smile; for memory presented at the moment the ‘poor friend’ sitting at the lighted dessert-table, with a curiously-peeled orange before her, prepared in a manner which gave it the appearance of a beautiful but eccentric water-lily. However, she accepted the praise, and was silent for a few minutes. Mrs. Selwyn hemmed awkwardly, and began :

‘Talking of fruit, my dear,’ she said, feeling that she would give half the remaining years of her life that Bella should be able to clear herself from the heavy imputations in store for her—‘talking of fruit, I am

astonished to find a bill brought in by Gordon for a quantity of different articles which were never ordered by me.'

'Indeed!' said Bella, in a tone of perfect indifference.

'Yes, here it is; I believe it is dated on a day when the poor Major' (why are all people called 'poor' when they are dead?) 'went with the children to Exeter.'

Bella cast her eyes over the account. 'Ah, yes; I have no doubt poor Ned had the things to treat the children, little darlings.'

'But *I* did not desire to treat the children. Why should the bill be sent to me?'

'That, my dearest mamma, is entirely a mistake. The Major told me that he paid the bill before he left the shop. Indeed, I am pretty sure that I saw the receipt in his coat-pocket. No one can say that there was ever anything mean or stingy about *him*. When he did anything, it was done liberally.'

'Had he been less liberal, Bella, your little

Elia might have been alive at the present moment,' said the mother unwisely, having been a little provoked by Bella's praise of her deceased husband, who had been a stumbling-block in the path of Mrs. Selwyn's comfort for the last fifteen years.

'I am astonished,' said Bella coldly, 'that you should voluntarily recall the circumstances of my poor child's death, which I consider to have been as much your act as if you had cut her throat with your carving-knife. That fatal dose of castor-oil!'

'My dear Bella, I cannot believe you can be so ignorant, or so weak, as to believe that a dessert-spoonful of castor-oil ever killed any one.'

'She never rallied after it,' said Bella solemnly.

'Well, I killed her, then. Under those circumstances, I suppose that you and your husband thought I was bound to bury her; otherwise I know not why the bill for her

funeral expenses, mourning, &c., should have been sent in to me.'

Mrs. Selwyn could speak sharply when irritated, and always regretted it afterwards in sackcloth and ashes.

'I was not aware,' said Bella, putting her cambric handkerchief to her beautiful eyes, 'that the account had been sent to you; probably it was done so by mistake. I am sure poor Ned would not have encroached on your grudging kindness more than he was compelled. Doubtless you will find, so soon as I have communicated with his agents in India, that there are ample funds for the liquidation of all his debts.' Bella uttered this with an air of lofty independence.

'Humph!' said Mrs. Selwyn. 'Pray did not you order all these cosmetics? Is it possible that a daughter of mine can spend time and money on the decoration of her person, like those unhappy women who have no other means of obtaining their livelihood? Can

you, Bella, with a daughter nearly grown to womanhood, use pigments to give false beauty to your cheeks? I am ashamed of you!

‘Keep your shame, my dear mamma!’ cried Bella, laughing. ‘Of course I rouge; every woman living in the world rouges, unless she goes in for Parian tints, when she intends to be sentimental. The laughter-loving goddess is my model; that’s the style that suits me best. As for the bills, the stupid shopkeepers would not let me have the articles till I gave your name. Why should you worry about them? I daresay they will be paid some time or another; if not, ’tis no great matter; the shopkeepers will suffer, not you or I. Bless you! if I had your credit, I would live on it for a couple of years, aided by a few falsehoods, without any trouble.’ And she laughed again.

‘Bella,’ said Mrs. Selwyn, ‘you must know that I love you—have loved you, rather; for at present I feel only loathing for you, and

degradation at having brought forth such a disgrace to womanhood.'

'Go on ; what next ?' said Bella recklessly. 'If you expect that people who live in the world and know something of life are to be governed by the strict rules whereby you constrain that little old maid Mariana, you're mistaken. However, you will repent what you have said this night before the night is past. I am not going to live dependent on a mother who takes advantage of my unfortunate state,—deprived of the caresses of my darling Elia, and of the protection of my husband, who would have defended me from your reproaches—indeed, in his presence, you would never have dared to utter them, —who takes advantage of the bills for the funeral expenses of those dear lost objects of my devoted love, to taunt me with my poverty and dependence. I go, cruel woman ; you will never see me alive ; if my corpse is brought to your doors, you will probably re-

fuse to receive it, and send it to the parish to be buried.' And Bella rushed out of the room, without taking up the bonnet she had thrown on the arm of her mother's sofa.

Mrs. Selwyn listened breathlessly to her departing footsteps, but all was silent. Bella had on black-satin slippers, and trod so

'lightly, that the blind mole
Heard not her footfall.'

Mariana, however, had listened for the cessation of voices in the next room, and entered that of her mother, to find her flushed and agitated.

'Where is Bella?' said the mother in an agitated voice.

'Has she not just left you?' said Mariana, with some astonishment.

'Yes; but which way did she go?' cried Mrs. Selwyn.

Mariana thought her mother had become delirious again, as she rose from her sofa as if to seek for Bella. 'Be still, mother; I

have no doubt Bella is in her room. I will see ;' and she took one of the candles to carry out her intention.

Mrs. Selwyn had risen, and was standing with a white face and lips apart, watching for Mariana's return.

' She is in her room, mother ; at least I imagine so, for I hear her step as she is opening and shutting some drawers. I tried the door, but it was locked ; probably she is putting away her clothes before she goes to bed.'

' Why, my dear ?' cried Mrs. Selwyn, ' she never does that ; O'Rouke always puts away her clothes. Do knock and ask if you can do anything for her.'

Mariana left the room again unwillingly, and returned with this message—that Bella only wanted to be left quiet ; she required nothing, and only wished for repose.

' I daresay she is tired,' said Mariana apologetically ; and Mrs. Selwyn, partially

relieved, was obliged to be content to wait for a reconciliation till the following morning.

She asked her eldest daughter to remove the bonnet, lest she should crush it accidentally; who placed it on the top of a chest of drawers, where Mrs. Selwyn looked at it with that strange fascination with which one invests bonnets and hats with the faces and heads of the absent. She was filled with remorse for her unkindness to Bella. There seemed to be some foundation for her reproaches, some truth in her accusation as to the untimeliness of her statements. But any mother, she thought, must have been shocked and provoked by such a shameless avowal of want of principle. Probably poor Bella had not meant half she had said. She had been driven into a corner by the apparition of those miserable bills, and had probably expected, nay, did now expect, that what was left of her husband's property would liquidate them.

She would send for poor Bella in the morning, and tell her that she was as dear to her as ever, and welcome to share her income so long as her mother had an income to share.

When Mariana had lighted the watch-candle and was about to leave the room, her mother looked at her so earnestly, that her daughter asked if there was anything else she could do for her. For very shame sake Mrs. Selwyn could not send her again; so she answered, ‘Nothing!’ in a faint voice, and closed her eyes.

When she thought Mariana was asleep, with throbbing pulses she opened the door softly, and stole to that of Bella’s room, stooping her ear to the key-hole to listen. The candle was extinguished, and there was no perceptible sound.

‘Bella!’ cried her mother in a low tone, ‘Bella! ’tis I, ’tis your mamma!’ But there was no response. ‘Bless her, dear child!

she is asleep, and has forgotten our little quarrel already;' and Mrs. Selwyn crept back to her own bed, and slept soundly in her respite from some portion of anxiety and fatigue.

CHAPTER XV.

DAWN.

MORNING, which brings joy to some, brings trouble to many; and at half-past seven, when the cold light struggled through the frosted panes, Mrs. Selwyn awoke to the remembrance of her trouble as regarded Bella, and of the bitter words which had passed between them. Like all people who are both hasty and warm-hearted, she remembered only her own *lâches*, and forgot the causes of them, dwelling on her own unkindness, and softening or ignoring how much Bella had done to merit it.

Bella did not rise early as a rule, and Mrs. Selwyn would not on any account disturb her sleep. When Mary came to bring her hot water in the morning, Mrs.

Selwyn desired the servant to let Mrs. O'Connor know that her mother wished to see her so soon as she rang her bell.

Mariana shortly after brought the tea for Mrs. Selwyn's breakfast. She drank it eagerly in silence, for her lips were parched with anxiety about Bella. She continued to repeat to herself, however,

'She is safe in her room. I shall know if she wants to go out, for her bonnet is here. I shall see her presently, and then we will exchange forgiveness.'

Mariana, who came to read the service of the day to her, wondered to see the trembling hands of her mother as she supported herself on her elbow to listen to the parable of the Prodigal Son. The tears fell from the tender eyelids of the mother as she listened to the last consolatory verse: 'For this thy brother, who was dead, is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

Eleven o'clock came, but no summons

proceeded from Bella's room. O'Rouke was summoned to inquire if she had lighted the fire as usual ; but she replied that her mistress had locked the door when she retired to her room, and had desired that she might not be disturbed till she rang on the following morning. She dared not knock, or Mrs. O'Connor would be 'mad' with her.

Mariana saw that her mother was uneasy, and hated Bella with a natural jealousy, and with a conviction that all the worry connected with her would destroy whatever Mrs. Selwyn yet possessed of health, life, and the means of life. She went impatiently to the door of Bella's bedroom, and knocked loudly.

'Bella, get up ! You are very late. My mother wants to speak to you.'

She stopped, and listened for an answer. Her mother, having crawled out from her room, leant with a white face against the door-sill.

‘Bella !’ cried her sister, in a louder key, ‘get up ! We want to have some breakfast.’

Not a sound.

‘Sure ’tis dead she is !’ said Judy O’Rouke with a face of horror, who had crept upstairs on hearing Mariana’s battery of the door.

‘Break it open,’ said Mrs. Selwyn, speaking with difficulty; and Judy procured a poker, and tried to drive it through one of the panels, but the sturdy oak door resisted. Mrs. Selwyn begged her with a trembling voice to call James, who, putting his strong shoulder against the wood-work above the lock, broke it open, and the women rushed in. The bed had not been slept in. There was no confusion in the room ; a little black-silk handkerchief was on the dressing-table, which Mrs. Selwyn had observed round her daughter’s neck.

‘At what time did you bring Mrs. O’Connor home last evening?’ asked Mariana of James.

‘At no time at all,’ responded James. ‘I was home at one o’clock. She said Mrs. Herbert would send her home in a post-chaise. I suppose she did, seeing that I saw the marks of wheels in the snow this morning; and the snow fell early in the evening, but after I came in with my carriage and horse.’

Mrs. Selwyn took Mariana’s hand, and went back with her to her own bedroom.

‘O, my child!’ said the poor mother, in an agony of anxiety and remorse. ‘We had words last night, and Bella was desperate, and declared she would never see me again; and I am sure she has destroyed herself;’ and Mrs. Selwyn burst into a fit of hysterical weeping.

‘Mother, Bella is the last person to do anything likely to hurt herself; she has too much regard for her own person. She is very passionate, unreasonable, and unprincipled,’ added the elder daughter indig-

nantly, for she was very jealous of her mother's love for her recreant child; 'and she is too inherently selfish to commit suicide. Do not be uneasy, my dear mother. I venture to say, that if I go to Exeter I shall find her in perfect health at the house of Mrs. Herbert. If I may have the carriage at once, I daresay I shall bring her back in the afternoon. If I don't succeed in this, you will have the comfort of knowing that she is safe.'

Mrs. Selwyn was comforted by Mariana's tone of decision, and the younger lady, having directed the carriage to be brought round, went to her room to prepare for her journey. She seldom went to Exeter, for she had little money to spend, and few purchases to make consequently. The place was full of pitfalls of temptation to the penniless lady, who kept clear of it for that reason. A neat white print with a delicate pink or lilac flower, at tenpence a

yard, was a snare as besetting to Mariana as a ten-shilling silk to her sister Bella. Bella made a point of never being tempted long. It was both wrong and useless, she declared; so she purchased any article she could procure on credit, and then, as she sagely observed, it was no longer a temptation.

Mariana felt her heart beat quick when she drove up to the house in which Mrs. Herbert had apartments.

‘Is Mrs. Herbert at home?’ she asked, trembling all over.

‘Yes, missis is in bed.’

‘Ah, yes; I know—she is ill.’

‘Missis is not up,’ said the maid.

‘Is she awake? and—is Mrs. O’Connor with her?’ cried Mariana, flushing up at having to make inquiries of a poor maid-servant as to what had become of her own sister.

‘Mrs. Herbert is asleep, ma’am. Mrs.

O'Connor is not with her; she dined here last night, and had a postchaise to go home. Jim, from the Golden Hart, drove her; for I heard her tell him to drive carefully, 'cause of the snow.'

'O, would you mind awaking Mrs. Herbert,' said Mariana, pressing half-a-crown into the girl's hand, 'and asking her if she has any notion where Mrs. O'Connor can be?'

The girl, urged on by this bribe, went upstairs; and in Mariana's anxiety to hear the answer, she followed the servant to the chamber-door, and heard the message delivered and the answer it obtained.

'She dined here yesterday, tell Miss Selwyn; but where she is now, I neither know nor care.'

This unfeeling announcement might be excused by the fact, that Mrs. Herbert was not aware of the proximity of the inquirer. As it was, it was a fulfilment of the pro-

verb, ‘that listeners hear no good of themselves.’

‘I hope Mrs. Herbert is quite well,’ said Mariana rather viciously to the servant as she held the door open for her departure; curtseying in the remembrance of the half-crown she had just received.

‘Quite well, thank you, miss.’

‘She is recovered, then?’

‘No, miss. She has never been ill, that I ever heard of.’

Mariana sighed.

‘As soon as they are born, they go astray and speak lies,’ she said. ‘Truly of Bella it may be said, that “the truth is not in her.”’

She turned from Mrs. Herbert’s door despondingly, and was about to enter the carriage, when she saw Mr. Hereward turn the corner of the street and coming towards her, on his way to the bank, which was close at hand.

Her instinct prompted her to appeal to one who had promised to aid her, on another subject, on the previous evening.

‘O, sir! O, Mr. Hereward! could I speak to you for a few moments?’

‘About *that* business?’ he inquired, thinking of the forged cheque.

‘O no! About my mother’s trouble and mine. Are you very busy?’

‘No; I can give you half an hour,’ said the man of business, taking out his watch.

‘Then come in.—And, James, drive very slowly for ten minutes into the country, and then turn.’

‘Well, Miss Selwyn, what is it?’

‘O, sir, we are so wretched!’ and Mariana began to cry. ‘We have lost Bella.’

‘Lost! not dead?’ cried the banker, to whom Bella was known by sight, and who had been struck by her beautiful person as much as the world was generally.

‘O, we don’t know,’ said Mariana, sobbing.

‘She had some words with my mother last night about those dreadful bills, and they parted in anger; Bella telling my mother that she would never see her again.’

Mr. Hereward, not knowing for a certainty Bella’s character, thought evidently that there was reasonable ground for anxiety.

He made Mariana repeat all the circumstances, and then desired James to turn his horse’s head towards the Golden Hart. Having arrived there he got out, and leaving Mariana in the carriage, desired to speak to the postboy who had driven Mrs. O’Connor to the Aspens on the previous night.

He stated that he had deposited her outside the gate of the mansion, and she had said she would not pay him till the following evening, when she should probably require his services again; that he lingered for about ten minutes, thinking she would send him out a drop to drink, as it was so cold

a night, but that she did not return ; and he knew nothing more.

The postboy did not vary in this statement, though Mr. Hereward put him through a sharp cross-examination.

The banker returned rather crestfallen to Miss Selwyn.

‘Has your sister any confidential maid?’ he asked.

‘She has an Indian nurse, an ayah, who is utterly useless to any one ; and an Irish-woman, who is intelligent, but I do not know if my sister confided in her at all.’

‘If you will permit me, madam,’ said he, ‘I will return with you, and speak to this person. I shall be glad of the opportunity of being introduced to Mrs. Selwyn, and of assuring her that all in my power shall be done to alleviate her present anxiety.’

Mariana expressed herself as being very grateful ; though, in fact, she would have been infinitely more pleased had he stayed

away. Her mother, she knew, would be pale with anxiety, nervous, and too miserable to feel any pleasure in the advent of a stranger. She never would consent to receive Mr. Hereward in her bedroom; and Mariana was uncertain if there was a fire in the breakfast-parlour—probably not.

Moreover, when she contrasted, in her memory, the look of wealth and luxury in the house she had visited on the previous evening with the general appearance of age and shabbiness at the Aspens, she felt the innocent shame of poverty.

Into the long piled carpet in Mr. Hereward's library her small feet sunk as if into a bed of deep green moss between the overhanging branches of a wood; in her mother's house the canvas cross-bars showed the foundation of flowers for ever faded and fled. The fire at the Limes glowed in a grate of polished steel, which reflected the flame at fifty different points; at the

Aspens, probably a bit of waste paper, a few cross sticks, and some cinders apologised for the absence of any heat whatever. Then the curtains of red faded to yellow at her own home ; and the rich crimson damask of Mr. Hereward's house—

Mariana was woman enough to feel the mortification, and to wish he would return quietly to the bank, and leave her to bear her troubles and her mother's as she best might.

These thoughts made her very silent as they drove towards Mariana's home.

'I fear,' said she timidly, 'that I have already encroached on the half-hour you were good enough to promise me.'

'Perhaps he may turn back,' she thought, 'when he remembers that.'

'Yes,' he said; "'tis a broken day now. I must give up my morning to this business of yours ; if I can elicit any circumstance likely to prove consolatory to Mrs. Selwyn or yourself, I shall be quite satisfied.'

There was no help for it. ‘I should not have cared,’ said poor Mariana to herself, ‘if I could but have got home first, to see that the house was a little tidy and comfortable.’

As they drove up to the door, Mariana observed footsteps coming from and going towards the pond in the grounds; and she recognised in the footmarks the delicate prints of her mother’s feet. The imprudent invalid had stolen down to assure herself by ocular proof that Bella was not floating on the surface of the water. The surface was frozen over, but a haunting dread filled the mother’s heart that her daughter might be lying below that thin coating of ice.

Mr. Hereward followed the direction of Mariana’s eyes, and said, ‘Where does it lead?’

‘To a pond,’ she answered with a shudder; ‘but I do not believe that my sister has destroyed herself.’

‘Why do you so judge?’

‘From her character: her temper is violent, but she would be more likely to injure others than herself when she is excited.’

Mariana ushered Mr. Hereward into the breakfast-room, where there was no fire. Her mother’s room only had one; and Mariana, striking a light, knelt down and applied it herself to the paper.

‘She has a charming figure, and a pretty trim waist,’ said the gentleman mentally.

Then she looked up with a little glow of shame on her face for having done what her guest must, she imagined, consider unlady-like, and said she would inform her mother of his arrival.

He caught a fold of her dress, and detained her a moment.

‘Manage to let me see your sister’s maid before I am introduced to Mrs. Selwyn; it will save time, madam. I should prefer seeing her quite alone.’

Mariana was not sorry to obtain a little longer time to prepare her mother for the visitor; and seeking O'Rouke, she sent her to the breakfast-room with some coals for the newly-lighted fire, whilst she went to communicate to poor Mrs. Selwyn the ill-result of her morning's expedition.

' You are Mrs. O'Connor's confidential servant?' began the banker.

' I was, poor lady, when she was in life.'

' You don't mean, my good woman,' he was going to say, but, remembering how offensive she might consider the term 'woman,' ' You don't mean to say, my good girl, that you think the poor lady has made away with herself?'

' Deed but I do; for the ould lady goes on about expense and expense enough to drive anybody wild; and she was always a free-handed one, poor darling!'

' She was fond of company, I believe?'

‘Yes, fond enough. She was a handsome lady as you ever saw.’

‘Ahem! Was she fond of her husband?’

‘O, she was always good-natured like to everybody,’ said Judy, fencing.

‘Had the Major any gentlemen that he considered very friendly with himself?’

‘Yes, sir; there was heaps of them, as was always smacking him on the back, and calling him “Ned,” and “old boy,” and giving him brandy-and-water.’

‘Any one in particular?’

‘Well, in Injy, Captain Tucker was a’most always at our bungalow; but I think he must be gone on leave from Exeter, for I have not heard missus and the children speak of him lately.’

‘Gone on leave!’ said Mr. Hereward, musing.—‘Well, my good girl, I hope your missus will turn up all safe and sound. You know, she might kill herself, but she could

not bury herself; so she must be found sooner or later. Has any one gone to the school where she placed the girl?’

No; Judy believed not.

Mr. Hereward was quite pleased with the brilliancy of his idea, and having dismissed Judy with a small gratuity, he broke the awkwardness of a first introduction, when Mrs. Selwyn entered the room, by inquiring if any one had thought of sending to the establishment where Mrs. O'Connor had her daughter.

When, in like extremities, one plan of finding a truant has broken down, there is no comfort to be afforded so efficient as proposing another. Mrs. Selwyn felt comforted in seeing the sympathetic face of a strange gentleman, who showed much commiseration in his expression (which he felt), and concealed the contempt which mingled with it. Women, all of them, were poor things at the best; and these two did not seem

to have a grain of sense between them. ‘Poor helpless fools !’ he called them in his heart.

Her face quite brightened at the thought that Bella, in her fury, might have taken herself off to the house of her old governess, where she had placed Julietta. She wondered she could have been so stupid as not to have thought of her before.

It was a pleasant supposition on which to rest, Mr. Hereward calculated ; though, from all he had heard of Mrs. O’Connor, he did not much fancy that she had taken refuge with an elderly spinster. It was something to make the women keep quiet ; and he left them with the assurance, that when he returned from Exeter at night he would drive down to the Aspens, and tell them the result of his investigations.

‘ How very kind and thoughtful he is !’ said Mrs. Selwyn enthusiastically. ‘ And what an intelligent face !’

‘Yes, intelligent, but not handsome,’ replied Mariana.

‘I think there is beauty wherever there is intelligence,’ said the mother, remembering with a grudge the handsome stupid face of the Major in his youth, which had for years turned from her the hearts of both daughters.

Mariana responded not. She felt that her admiration of an inane Apollo had blighted her youth, and more than suspected she had been a fool. Both the mother and the daughter were comforted by the thought that somebody cared for them, and was working in their interests better than they could for themselves; and both chorused that Mr. Hereward was most kind, and that the circumstance of the forged cheque had been a most fortunate one for them. Alas! they were unconscious of Bella’s guilt in the transaction.

Mariana had accompanied Mr. Hereward down to the door, knowing that it was ab-

surd to ring the bell, which Mary, who was making the bed, would not have heard.

‘Get those bills away from Mrs. Selwyn, if you can, madam, and let me look over them. It would be a premium on robbery if you were to pay charges which have probably been heaped up on the chance of long credit. I, being your trustee, disapprove of your paying at all; certainly, the less you are robbed, the better.’

Mariana hesitated.

‘It seems so underhand to take the bills without my mother’s knowledge.’

‘Then tell her that I wish to look over them,’ answered Mr. Hereward impatiently; who was accustomed to have his own way, and was becoming provoked at Mariana’s scruples. A moment after he relented. ‘A woman who objects to deceive her mother, even for that mother’s benefit, will not deceive her husband.’ It was evident from this chain of reasoning that Mr. Hereward looked

on Mariana in the light of a possible wife. There was an objection to his marrying, which he did not see could be overcome. His mother's old servant would never give her consent; and with that extraordinary power which seems sometimes vested in the weak for the confusion of the strong, this she-tyrant contrived to manage her master with complete success.

The notion of having a gentle, lady-like, and well-principled woman to greet him on his return from the bank, and to occupy the easy-chair on the opposite side of the fire, was a pleasant vision to the lonely bachelor who had contrived to discover that he was lonely for the first time. As he walked back to Exeter—for he had declined the offer of Mrs. Selwyn's carriage—he dwelt on the idea; but the presence of his housekeeper seemed to be an insuperable obstacle, unless his genius could strike out some means of extricating himself from her domination.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONVICTION.

WHILST Mr. Hereward's thoughts were occupied with the inhabitants of the Aspens, he did not forget the interests of the bank touching the forged cheque. He had a suspicion that Mrs. O'Connor had something to do with it.

‘Les absents ont toujours tort,’ he said. ‘Perhaps ’tis hard to judge the poor lady because she is out of the way ; but ’tis with women as with servants, a man must take his choice : if they are clever, they are vicious ; if good, they are stupid ; ergo, they take the rôle of goodness because they are not sharp enough for any other. I suspect

Mrs. Bella to be far more intelligent than Miss Mariana; whether her cleverness has carried her to the point of forging a cheque for a hundred pounds, we shall see. I confess I should not like to ally myself with a family one of the members of which I should have the power of hanging.'

He was tired when he reached Exeter, and hiring a postchaise, he drove to the farmhouse in one of the environs of Exeter where the young clerk was lying ill from brain-fever.

His mother curtesyed to the great man, who had the power of advancing her son in the world.

'Is he sensible, ma'am?'

'Yes, sir; but very weak.'

'Can I ask him a question?'

'The doctor said he was not to be worried, sir.'

'No one wants to worry him, my good woman; show me up.'

‘Just a moment, sir, if you please,’ she said, darting upstairs.

‘O, James, just let me put the comb through your hair. If I had but time to air a clean pillow-case! But here he is,—for Mr. Hereward had followed her upstairs.
‘Your master, Jamie.’

The youth turned his languid eyes, and flushed slightly. He had not much red blood left in him for the effort. Mr. Hereward was touched by the drawn face, and took the skeleton fingers in his hand.

‘Can you remember who presented this cheque for a hundred pounds, drawn by Mrs. Selwyn?’

‘Yes, sir,’ with a colour yet deeper; ‘a beautiful lady in deep mourning. She said she was Mrs. Selwyn’s daughter—I suppose it was Miss Selwyn.’

‘That will do.’

‘I did not do wrong, sir?’

‘No, no; of course not. Now lie still,

and I'll send you a few bottles of good port-wine to get up your strength. Good-bye.' And Mr. Hereward hurried downstairs, and into the postchaise.

'I thought so, upon my soul I did!' and he applied some unparliamentary language to the absent Bella, which would have withered up her mother and sister had they heard it, but at which that more philosophical lady would have laughed. 'Ha! hum! I thought so!' he continued to repeat. 'I will give that lady a piece of my mind which she will not like if I catch her. I *knew* she had done it. Thought her mother would let it pass, no doubt. She has not killed herself,' he said, with a feeling of provocation in his mind against her which made him half wish that she might have done so.

Mr. Hereward now ordered his hack-carriage to the barracks of the —th regiment of cavalry, and asked to speak to the colonel.

He had met this gentleman on several occasions, when he had had opportunities of obliging him with regard to remittances, and made no scruple now of speaking to him on the subject that occupied his thoughts.

‘Can you tell me,’ he said, ‘how many officers are on leave?’

‘Certainly. There is only one, who left yesterday, for a two months’ leave of absence from the Horse Guards—Cornet Bruce.’

‘What kind of man is he?’

‘O, a nice lad enough—plenty of money; will have more in a week or so, when he’s of age.’

‘Do you know whether he is likely to have had any companion in his journey?’

‘I should think not. He was always dangling after an officer’s wife here—a Mrs. Herbert—whom I saw yesterday. So she is safe enough.’

Mr. Hereward thanked him and departed.

He had been unsuccessful, and must now attack the old governess as a last chance. When he thought of Mrs. Selwyn's perturbed countenance, and the dumb anxiety of Mariana's eyes, he grieved at having no information to give them of Bella's locality, and determined, that though he would take every step secretly to make Bella refund the money if he could catch her, he would take the debt on himself, and say nothing of it to his partners, rather than load those innocent women with the opprobrium of belonging to so shameless and demoralised a relative.

The visit to the school proved fruitless, as he expected. The old lady had neither seen nor heard anything from Mrs. O'Connor, the sweet pupil whom she had reared. Since she had deposited her daughter Julietta in her hands, no letter had arrived for the young lady, for she must have been cognisant of the fact had it been so. Mr. Hereward did not

say that Mrs. O'Connor was missing, but said he had called, understanding that she was making a visit to her former governess. The lady curtseyed with the profound respect paid to wealth, though with a little disappointment, as she had hoped that his visit had been to announce the advent of another young lady.

It was the character of Mr. Hereward not to leave any subject till he had exhausted it. He returned to the barracks, and asked to speak to the messman, inquiring if Cornet Bruce had dined at mess on Thursday night, and at what time he left it.

The reply was, that Cornet Bruce had had a postchaise-and-pair, which his private servant had previously packed ; and that he had started from the door of the messroom about eleven at night, on his first stage towards his castle in the north of Scotland.

Then Mr. Hereward returned to the Golden Hart and inquired if the chaise which had

taken Cornet Bruce had been hired from thence.

No, it had not ; and they did not know where it had been procured, and, like Mrs. Herbert, were sure that they did not care — only 'twas unhandsome in Cornet Bruce, who had always dealt with them, to go giving his favours to some other house.

Then the banker went to every other keeper of posthorses in Exeter, and at length found that a pair of horses had been out the night before to take an officer a stage towards the north. Could he see the postboy ; and Mr. Hereward's fingers selected half a guinea to tempt him to loquacity by the sight of gold.

He was sent for, but the master of the house said he was out on a job, and would not be home till night. Then, feeling very crestfallen, the banker returned to his lair, to wait till the carriage should come to take

him to the Aspens, where his successless efforts must be recounted.

He felt assured himself of his ultimate success in discovering the missing lady. The knowledge that she had presented, and probably forged, the cheque gave quite sufficient reason for her keeping out of the way; and when he saw the postboy who had driven Cornet Bruce, he quite expected to hear that Mrs. O'Connor had been the gentleman's companion.

That evening Mr. Hereward had again occasion to postpone his dinner-hour, a circumstance which determined the redoubtable Sally to give him a piece of her mind as to the irregularity of his conduct next morning. She knew her master's humour too well to intrude on his hours of ease after dinner.

His heart ached at the look of expectant hope in the face of both the ladies as he entered the sitting-room, which died away

as he was obliged to admit that he had no reliable information to give them. He hoped for something definite to-morrow, and was compelled to leave them with that vague suggestion.

A sad evening Mariana had with her mother—a difficult task to find answers for the never-ending question,

‘But, Mariana, what can have become of her? O, Bella, Bella! She is dead, my darling child! And I killed her by my cruelty! I am sure she is at the bottom of that pond under the water-lilies.’

‘Mother, she can’t be there; but we will send James to break the ice. I will go with him. You know there would have been footprints on the snow had she gone there.’

‘It snowed in the night; it would have filled up the marks.’

Mariana left the room and sought James, and, with a lantern, they went through the

grounds to the pond in the garden, followed by O'Rouke.

James did not like the adventure. He did not know whether the Major might not ‘walk,’ though that gentleman’s objection to water whilst he was in this mortal state might probably, if James had been given to reasoning, have precluded his ghost from haunting the edge of the pond. He might also have to fish up some eerie figure from the muddy depths.

However, there was a spirit of curiosity about the adventure which overcame his scruples; and the ice was broken by the pickaxe, the roots of the withered water-lilies were disturbed, and nothing was found gleaming by the flickering rays of the lantern.

It was a cold search; and James was so cold and wet, that Mariana had to expend a large dose of hot brandy-and-water in consoling him for his evening’s work.

‘You see, mother, your fears are unfounded,’ said Mariana, who returned to shiver and crouch over the fire.

‘I am much obliged to you, Mariana. I hope you won’t take cold, my dear. Poor James, too!’ said the lady, feeling much ashamed of fears which had proved futile. ‘Tis half-past six o’clock, and James beds up and goes home at seven. When you are quite warm, dear child,’ continued the old lady, feeling in her ample pocket, ‘I wish you would give him this half-crown for me.’

Mariana went down, and found him alone basking over the kitchen-fire, whilst he drained the last drops of the brandy-and-water which had been Mariana’s provision for his comfort.

‘Do not get up, James, if your clothes are not dry,’ she said sweetly. ‘Your mistress has sent you half-a-crown for searching the pond.’

‘Much obliged,’ said James, pulling his forelock. ‘Womankind are mostly full of fancies. I should have thought missis would have known Miss Bella—that is, Mrs. O’Connor—better than to believe she’d go and drown herself. I think,’ he added, with a twinkle in his eye, and with a tongue let loose by the action of the brandy on his brain, ‘I could give a better guess than that as to where the lady is, or leastways where she is gone.’

‘Where?’ cried Mariana, in a tone of horror and anxiety combined.

‘Never you mind,’ replied James, now pretty well half drunk. ‘I didn’t see the young officer a-coming up to the carriage, and sniggling, and bowing, and blushing for nothing every day when I drove Mrs. O’Connor to Exeter.’

Mariana felt herself degraded by listening to any more of this babble of a drunken man with regard to her sister; so putting

on an air of indifference she was far from feeling, she said that no doubt they should hear in a day or two from Mrs. O'Connor.

‘No, that you won’t,’ interrupted James slyly.

‘And till then, the less said about her absence the better for all parties.’

She said nothing of James’s suppositions to her mother. The thought of Bella having gone off with a young officer, her husband not a month since placed in his grave, would be shocking enough, supposing matrimony was their intention; and she could scarcely think that to be the case, when there could be no legal impediment to their marriage in a regular way. She could only return to her mother, and, by added tenderness, try to allay the fever of her anxiety and irritation.

Presently, as Mariana spoke of hope as regarded the plans Mr. Hereward had mentioned, Mrs. Selwyn observed how very kind

and friendly he had been in his conduct to two women who had no claims on him, and to whom he had been till the last few days a perfect stranger.

‘Yes, ‘tis very true ; only, I suppose,’ said Mariana, ‘twas the trusteeship.’

‘I wonder whether he has any clue to the forgery of the cheque, Mariana?’ and the unconscious mother passed all her tradesmen in review, to see if there were a chance that either should have done it.

‘Pray do not think of it, mother. It is so shocking to sully with a breath of suspicion, even in thought, folks who may be perfectly innocent.’

‘Are you quite sure, dear, that I am not to be held liable for the hundred pounds?’

‘Quite sure,’ replied Mariana.

‘Because I must see about paying what I can of those dreadful debts. I can’t tell what I can do, my dear child.’

‘Pray do not think of them now, mother ;

we have anxiety enough in Bella's absence. You *cannot* be answerable for them either in law or equity.'

'In law, no; in equity, I think I am. Who should be responsible for the misdoings of a child but his parents? If my daughter should be extravagant, should Mr. Gordon the confectioner, or Miss Mount-stephens the mantua-maker, or the chemist, or the shoemaker suffer because I have brought into the world an unprincipled child? I shall have to pay those bills somehow, and I must see how it is to be done. I must get rid of the poor old horse; he will have to be shot.'

'O no!' said Mariana impatiently. 'He will fetch a five-pound note; sell him, by all means.'

'And sacrifice the poor beast to be driven about in a butcher's cart over the rough stones, to be starved and beaten by day, and left without straw to lie on at night!'

‘Sacrifice the innocent to the guilty, by all means. James too, after giving you the best years of his life, must seek another master, because your daughter Bella prefers her own luxuries to other people’s rights. Mother, you may think yourself a high-principled woman ; but I tell you plainly, that you are so hoodwinked by your absurd fondness for Bella, that you grope about in the dark without knowing what is right and what is wrong.’

‘I am sure, my dear, I do not wish to part with the old horse if I can possibly keep him. There is the silver—I could sell that ; but I fear, though ’tis so handsome, second-hand plate fetches so little that it will not go far in paying Bella’s debts.’

‘I do not think you have a right to part with it—certainly, not with more than half ; for what have I done to forfeit my claim on your justice ? Have I ever left you ? Did I not give up the man I loved, though I was

half broken-hearted to do so, to please you—giving the greatest proof of duty and affection a child can give her parent? And now you are talking of selling what ought to be mine, if I survive you, to pay debts of Bella's, as an encouragement to her to contract a fresh set immediately!'

Mariana's indignant eloquence startled and silenced Mrs. Selwyn; for her daughter was usually quiet in her manner, and slow and gentle in speech.

Mariana spoke again with more deliberation. 'Mother,' said she, 'I wish you would let Mr. Hereward look over those bills. As a man of business, he would detect over-charges, which were probably made in consideration of the long credit the tradespeople expected to give.'

'Mr. Hereward? My dear, what an idea! I could not let him see the items in poor Bella's bills—so indelicate: the perfumer's, you know.'

Mrs. Selwyn forgot in her confusion that Mariana was not aware of the articles charged. According to this bill, Bella might have bathed in baths of eau-de-cologne; the fact having been that the Major, in the insanity of his passion for drink, was in the habit of consuming quantities of this fluid but little diluted by water.

‘Very well,’ said Mariana impatiently; ‘conceal the perfumer’s; though I don’t know why there should be any objection to showing a bill for lavender or elder-flower water. Bella might have been contented with what Mary concocts in the still-room, I should have thought. But, as the bill has been contracted, and you seem determined to pay it, surely it would be better to see whether the charges are enormous.’

‘I don’t see what Mr. Hereward can have to do with my affairs, or poor Bella’s,’ said the mother impatiently. ‘I must say ’tis very indelicate in you, Mariana, to want to show

up your sister's foibles to a stranger. You take a great deal on yourself—you and this new friend of yours.'

Mariana was silent. She could not tell her mother that she intended to pay the bills herself out of her small fortune. It was very sad that her mother should love best the daughter who had brought all this grief and shame and confusion on their house. Bella doing evil was more tenderly thought of than Mariana, who had never wavered in her duty to her mother. She kept silence; for she felt very heart-sore; and the mother said to herself, 'Mariana's disposition is so sullen. Bella, though often impertinent, was so cheerful. Ah, she was such a charming companion!' And a burst of anxious tears concluded this mental soliloquy, when she thought that her violent expression of sentiments right in themselves had driven Bella from the shelter of her mother's roof—whither?

CHAPTER XVII.

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS.

THE next morning, at nine o'clock, a servant in livery from the Limes brought a quantity of beautiful hothouse flowers, with Mr. Hereward's compliments to Mrs. Selwyn—an act of homage which made Mariana's cheeks flush; for she could not help thinking that they were intended for her, though addressed to her mother. When they had walked from the Limes together, Mariana had observed on the extent of the greenhouses round his house; and he had gathered from her that her favourite flower was the tuberose; but as, she said simply, she could never afford to

buy the roots, she had not inhaled the perfume of one since she was a child.

Mrs. Selwyn was delighted with the attention, and took the flowers up one by one, delicately placing them in tall old-fashioned champagne-glasses, which had never been occupied for twenty years by any fluid more potent than water. She knew that flowers never looked so well in any other locality except when growing, and that all modern and fanciful inventions of cornucopias, Chinese vases, &c., were mistakes in point of beauty. She went on arranging them, and repeating :

‘What! another tuberose! What extravagance in tuberoses! The perfume in the room is quite overpowering.’

Mariana blushed at every fresh enumeration; but Mrs. Selwyn, unobservant, did not perceive it.

‘Tis a comfort that modest women contrive to feel their little glowings of bashful-

ness long after the first bloom of youth has faded, and that these soft sentiments may be evoked by gentlemen of the ripe age of forty-eight.

‘Did you order the footman some beer, Mariana?’ inquired the lady.

‘No, mother; I did not think he would like it so early in the morning.’

‘I suppose I ought to have given him a shilling,’ said the poor lady with a sigh.

On inquiring of Mary, it was found that the young man had left the basket, and had gone away immediately, saying there was no answer; so the ladies enjoyed the beauty of the flowers without any prickings of conscience.

Some information was gained on that day by the ladies with regard to Bella, which relieved them from all dread as to her life. A bill was sent by Miss Mountstephens to Mrs. Selwyn for a Leghorn bonnet, richly trimmed with pink ribbon, and ornamented

by a long ostrich-feather. Leghorns in those days were both rare and expensive.

‘This must be a mistake or an imposition,’ said Mrs. Selwyn. ‘It is dated on the fifteenth—the day on which my poor Bella disappeared. Mariana, I will not be so imposed on. You shall go to Exeter, and remonstrate with Miss Mountstephens.’

‘Must I tell her that Bella is missing?’ inquired Mariana.

‘Why, on that point, my dear, I must trust to your discretion. You must see her alone. Four pounds seventeen and sixpence for a bonnet!’

‘Yes, mother; you had better sell the old horse and pay it,’ said the daughter tauntingly.

‘Pray do not drive me distracted, Mariana. I shall order the carriage, and I will go and see Miss Mountstephens myself;’ and she rang the bell angrily.

‘Mother,’ said Mariana, subdued at once,

“the east wind is deadly. It would be very imprudent to go when you are not half recovered. Pray forgive my petulance, and let *me* go for you.”

But Mrs. Selwyn answered not a word, and prepared for her drive to Exeter.

Mariana waited in the hope that her mother would ask her to accompany her; but Mrs. Selwyn passed her without speaking, and left her elder daughter to grieve over the effect of her ill-temper.

It was a comfort to inhale the sweetness of the tuberoses, to revel in the bright tints of the geraniums, and to believe that Mr. Hereward cared for her—a little. If she could but have *one* person who preferred her to all the rest of the world; one person higher in the scale of existence than that darling dog, who walked up and down after her, asking with eyes human in their wistful inquiry what had vexed his dear mistress, and, probably, observing with a doggish questioning

and wonderment why she buried her nose in odours so loathsome to doggish noses as lilies, heliotropes, and myrtles !

In the mean time Mrs. Selwyn, nervous at going alone, and too indignant with her daughter to accept her as a companion, was driven to the establishment of Miss Mount-stephens, and desired to speak to that lady alone.

‘Dear me,’ said the mantua-maker, ‘Mrs. Selwyn ! Ladies should not come so early, before one has time to turn oneself about.’

She had been dusting the show-rooms, in which the dresses and mantles were all hung up in brown-holland bags, and had only time to rush to her bedroom and apply

‘With art’s coarse pencil the ill-chosen red,’

when one of the apprentices ushered up the stern-looking widow, on whom ‘lady’ was inscribed in every look and tone, notwithstanding

ing her shabby silk dress and the rusty crape with which it was trimmed.

‘Anything I can do for you, ma’am? Anything in the way of silks, cloaks, furs, muffs?’

‘No, I thank you. I have called to inquire about this account, charged to me.’

‘Yes; certainly, ma’am. Perhaps ’twas a little too sharp to send it in at once; only I thought, as Mrs. O’Connor was going on a journey, that, being so small a trifle, it might be overlooked, you see, ma’am; and so I thought it best to send it in at once, for fear of mistakes. I am sure twelve months hence will be quite soon enough to pay it, if I understand that I am to look to you for the money, ma’am.’

‘On what day did you supply my daughter with the bonnet?’

‘On the day named in the little account, ma’am; the fifteenth. The article had been ready for several days, but the lady said she

should prefer my keeping it till she called for it.'

'And she called on the fifteenth?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'About what time?'

'Well, 'twas very late—only I said we should be all up getting ready Mrs. Gibson's mournings — 'twas past eleven at night.'

Mrs. Selwyn turned her head towards one of the brown-holland bags to conceal the flush of relief which passed over her face on hearing what proved that Bella, so far from having contemplated self-destruction, had only left her crape bonnet at home because she was provided with one fabricated of Leg-horn, to be called for at pleasure, and that pleasure had been at half-past eleven o'clock on the night when she had left the Aspens, and, quitting her mother without explanation, had inflicted on her the most poignant anguish she had ever suffered.

‘O Bella, you are utterly worthless!’ was the conviction in her mother’s mind.

‘Sweet gros de Naples this!’ cried Miss Mountstephens, stripping the mantle trimmed with black velvet of its covering. ‘Here is one trimmed with sable, just like one purchased by a young officer for a lady. Ahem! ’Twas a magnificent cloak, with tippet and muff to match—eighty guineas. O, yes, ma’am! money down; and the gentleman never asked discount for ready money; but I scorned to take advantage of a young gentleman under age, and I took off the discount.’

Mrs. Selwyn asked to look at some small neckerchiefs of pink silk, and purchased an inexpensive one for Mariana. She felt bound to buy something after occupying the time of Miss Mountstephens.

‘About the account, ma’am?’

‘I do not promise to pay it, Miss Mountstephens. It can stand over for the present.’

‘Unsatisfactory old cat,’ said the mantua-maker to herself. But she opened the door, and stood respectfully till Mrs. Selwyn had entered the carriage and had drawn up the glass of the carriage.

‘Home, slowly,’ said the matron, for she was in no hurry to see her daughter Mariana again, feeling a little shame at the agony of grief she had wasted on Bella’s disappearance.

And what could be the plans of that wilful woman now? When, fifteen years before, she had eloped from the school where she had been placed by Mrs. Selwyn, she had married the object of her attachment. Could the newly-made widow hope to contract another matrimonial alliance now, at the age of thirty-three? ‘However, she is beautiful enough to turn the head of any man,’ said her mother.

What could she tell Mariana, who would triumph so much? for if not in her words, she would show it in her looks. Certainly

she had been unjust to Mariana in the untiring love she had evinced towards her younger daughter; and with what ingratitude she had been repaid! She ought to forgive Mariana's petulance, which was founded on justice ; but just then she had a vision of Bella sitting by her side, holding towards her the oranges she had brought for her mother from her friend's lodgings at Exeter, and her eyes filled with tears. Bella was so very pleasant to talk with and to look at. Mariana was rather a dull reflection of her mother. Mrs. Selwyn felt that she was herself a gloomy landscape repeated in Mariana —a smooth sullen pool. Bella was a dashing mountain stream, so sparkling and brilliant, that folks did not stop to consider what poison flowers dropped their pollen in its waves, and carried destruction to those who imbibed them.

'If I could but think she was married!' was now her mother's ever-recurring thought.

She had no fear in such a case that her husband would ill-use her Bella. Bella, she knew, would, like Isabel the fisherman's wife, have her own will, whosoever the fisherman might be. She must tell Mariana of Bella's safety.

Her elder daughter came to the door to receive her timidly, for she grieved that she had vexed her mother by her petulance. Mrs. Selwyn kissed her slightly in passing. The kiss meant a great deal, for both the mother and daughter were chary of caresses.

‘Mariana,’ the mother said when her daughter followed her mutely into the bedroom, where Mrs. Selwyn took off her bonnet and rolled up the strings, fastening them with pins before they were carefully put away in the bonnet-box, ‘she is safe enough. She called at Miss Mountstephens’ and took away the bonnet—’

‘And sent the bill to you?’ asked Mariana indignantly.

‘Yes, my dear. I fear there is no doubt but that she is an unprincipled young woman. But O, Mariana, I think I could forgive all rather than that reckless disregard to my feelings. I have been made so wretched; and now—how can I tell what disgrace she may not be bringing on us!’

‘Well, mother, ’tis a comfort to you to know that she is alive, and has taken her own path to happiness. If she happens to miss it, you need not think that your reproaches drove her out on the world; for, you see, the pink-trimmed bonnet was waiting to be called for, that it might supersede the widow’s weeds.’

‘I wish,’ said the mother with a sigh, ‘that she had taken O’Rouke and the ayah with her; I cannot afford to support them.’

That day, whilst Mrs. Selwyn was interrogating Miss Mountstephens, Mr. Hereward was equally busy in extracting intelligence from the postboy. There was this differ-

ence—that Mr. Hereward's efforts cost him a bribe of five shillings, and Mrs. Selwyn obtained hers at the sacrifice of three and sixpence for a kerchief which she would not otherwise have purchased, but the possession of which gave Mariana much content.

The five shillings opened the heart and loosed the tongue of the postboy, who said with a grin that he was not going to spoil sport, but that he supposed there was no harm in telling the truth, now the gentleman and lady was safe off; and that Captain Bruce (the lower class admit of no inferior title in the army) had gone away with the Major's widow; and a fine handsome lady she was. He wished them luck, both of 'em, for they paid him well.

Then Mr. Hereward obtained from the messman Cornet Bruce's address, and wrote the following letter to Mrs. O'Connor, Corraline Castle, Argyleshire, care of Cornet Bruce :

‘Exeter, February 17, 1823.

‘MADAM,—In consequence of your having, on the 15th of December last, presented a forged cheque at the Exeter Bank, and received cash for the same, I regret to have to inform you, that if the hundred pounds be not immediately remitted to our firm by you, we shall be compelled to institute proceedings against you, of which the results must be destructive to your character, and probably to your life.—I remain, madam, your servant, EDGAR HEREWARD.’

Mr. Hereward contented himself with sending a note to the Aspens that evening. He was disposed to regard Mariana with much affection, but the age with him was past when men take important steps rashly. He might smoothe over the forgery case by paying the hundred pounds himself; but he could not make up his mind to ally himself with this sister of a woman who must be pointed

at in the world as the mistress of Cornet Bruce.

His note was to Mrs. Selwyn, and in it he informed her that he had convincing proof that Mrs. O'Connor had left Exeter perfectly well on the night of the 15th.

This information was but stale news to the ladies; and Mariana felt a sense of chill and disappointment that he had not called himself to communicate his intelligence. She walked up and down the room with restless movement, stopping to bury her face in the tuberoses for consolation, and thinking that they were rather withered, and not so fragrant as before.

‘Surely she will write to us. She *must* write soon,’ Mrs. Selwyn said every day, when the post-hour went by without bringing a letter.

In sweeping the room Bella had occupied, Mary found, in a crevice of the flooring, a diamond, which Bella must have dropped

from a ring she was in the habit of wearing. Mrs. Selwyn wrapped it in writing-paper and put it in the bureau. Bella might ask for it some day.

Bella missed the stone, and made up her mind to write and ask for it when she had time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRATAGEM.

IT would be seven days before Mr. Hereward could get an answer even by the return of the post. It was very irritating to have to wait, and the restraint under which he placed himself not to call at the Aspens made him fault-finding, and, to confess the truth, somewhat intolerable to his womankind at home.

The idea that Sally would disapprove of her master's marrying, if he wished it, gave him a feeling of fury against her, the cause for which she was utterly ignorant; seeing that he had gone only twice to the Aspens, and had discontinued his visits to

that mansion ; she was quite at fault as to his irritability, and though there was no gout in the family that Sally had ever heard of, she imagined that her master was about to have an attack of that temper-disturbing malady. He watched her furtively, and in his seven days of suspense he matured his plan for freedom from her jurisdiction.

‘John,’ said Mr. Hereward to the footman as he waited on him, just as he had placed the almonds and raisins and winter apples on the table, ‘I have observed for some time past your attentions to Sally. I should be sorry to stand in the way of the union of two faithful hearts ; on the contrary, I will do all in my power to further your wishes. The lease of the Abbey Farm will be out at Lady-day, and, if you like to take it and marry Sally, you shall have it at easy rent, and pay me for the stock by instalments.’

‘Dear me, sir !’ cried the man, with a look of dismay, ‘I never thought of Sally as a

wife. You see, sir, she's more like a mother to me. And she's got a tongue.'

'That, my good fellow,' interrupted his master; 'that's the sort that makes the best of wives. Your gentle, mealy-mouthed women are of no use in the world.' Mr. Hereward was obliged to gulp this down, feeling very guilty in the knowledge that Mariana's meekness was her great attraction in his eyes. 'Think of the respectability of being a farmer, and casting off the slough of the green plush. Think of taking a cheerful glass with the best of them at the market-table, and coming home to find a bright fire, a pint of home-brewed, and a smoking supper of pig's fry of your own fattening. No obligation to be up in the morning at six o'clock, except for the interest of your own concerns. Your own master.'

'Your honour is very kind, said John.
'I'll think of it.'

Mr. Hereward, when he went that night

to his bedroom, rang for Sally, to make some inquiry as to a missing pocket-handkerchief; and when that which had never been lost had been found, he turned suddenly on the old servant, and said,

‘Sally, I have observed that John has been less attentive to his duties than usual. I can see the cause of it; the poor fellow is in love.’

‘In love, sir!’ cried the woman with the face of a fury. And she made a silent vow that she would give it to the hussy if she discovered her.

‘Yes, Sally; and with you.’

‘With *me*, sir? Good lawk!’ and she turned her face aside, and laughed.

‘Ah, yes! I’ve eyes in my head, Sally. I have seen the looks he has cast at you when you have not been looking.’

‘Well, really, sir, you must excuse it. You see, young men will be young men, and when they are mad upon a woman they

cannot hide it,' and she blushed and sniggered like a young maiden of eighteen instead of an old one of sixty-eight.

' You have been a faithful servant to me,' said Mr. Hereward; ' and when you and John make up your mind to marry, there's the Abbey Farm will be vacant at Lady-day, and I will let it to you for an easy rent, and let you pay for the stock and furniture by instalments.'

Sally dropped her lowest curtsey, and said she would turn it over in her mind; but how should she leave so kind a master, and what would he do without her?

To this Mr. Hereward responded, that there was no sacrifice he would not make for her comfort; and that the distance was not so great as to prevent her giving a look at what was going on in the servants' department at the Limes. This last argument, and the secret pleasure of triumphing over cook by being a farmer's wife and taking

John entirely from her fascinations, was too potent to be resisted ; and she curtseyed to her master, professing the most profound gratitude for the arrangement.

The letter came at length from Corraline Castle, as did also an answer to one which he had addressed to a correspondent in the county town near which Cornet Bruce resided.

As Bella's letter was most interesting, Mr. Hereward yielded to its prior claim. It was thus expressed :

‘Corraline Castle, Feb. 28.

‘SIR,—I might well permit myself some expressions of resentment in answer to a letter containing imputations at once so insulting and so ungrounded ; but the conviction that you are entirely misled as to the facts of the case softens involuntarily the anger which the perusal of your letter at first provoked.

‘My mother, Mrs. Selwyn, gave me the

cheque to meet a pressing pecuniary necessity of my late husband, Major O'Connor. She presented it to me willingly, expressing at the time her hope that the sum might be sufficient to relieve the Major from his embarrassment. I saw with pain that my dear mother's mind was much shaken when I returned to England, and that she was frequently unconscious one day of circumstances that had taken place on the preceding evening. There is another reason why she may now feel it convenient to deny the fact of her having given us this hundred pounds. I regret to say she lives in constant terror of my sister Mariana, who, by the combined violence and sullenness of her temper, and her intense jealousy of me and my poor children, has made my mother's life wretched ever since my return from India. But though she forgets that she is a sister, I cannot but remember that I am a daughter, and I enclose a cheque for a hundred pounds on the Inverary

Bank, which will be duly honoured, to be placed to Mrs. Selwyn's account. It is a matter of indifference to me what my sister may think on this matter, provided my mother is safe from her vituperation. I would rather my sister considered me guilty of forging a cheque than that my poor dear mother should be exposed to any worry on the subject.

‘From your address to me, you seem unconscious of my proper designation, and that I have the honour of signing myself, truly yours,

‘BELLA BRUCE.’

‘Clever woman!’ said Mr. Hereward, with a smile of satisfaction. ‘I hope the cheque may be honoured.’

Then he opened the other letter with the Inverary postmark.

‘Union Bank, Inverary.

‘DEAR SIR,—In answer to your inquiries

with regard to Edward Bruce, Esq., I beg to state that he is a young gentleman of large landed and funded property, who became of age on Tuesday last, on which occasion he introduced his bride to a large assembly of county neighbours, tenants, and retainers : a lady rather older than himself, but one who captivated all hearts by the beauty of her person, and the intelligence and grace of her demeanour. I send you the *Inverary Chronicle*, which will give you a correct account of the festivities that marked this happy day. We understand that the bride is from your neighbourhood, near Exeter. Mr. Bruce's income cannot be less, judging from the monies passing through our hands, than thirty-two thousand a-year. We conceive ourselves lucky that he has determined to continue to bank with us, as his trustees have been accustomed to do during his minority. I have written at greater length than I should otherwise have done, as it seemed to me from your

letter that you were personally interested in the subject.

‘With best wishes for your health,
‘Yours faithfully,
‘SAMUEL MARKS.’

The paper sent contained a florid account of the reception of the young heir by his tenants, of the evergreen arches which adorned the road leading to the castle, of the hundreds of well-dressed people who thronged the way, of the magnificent cream-coloured horses which drew the open carriage, the manly person of the young bridegroom, and the exquisite beauty of the bride—who was attired in a travelling-dress of brown velvet bordered by rich sables, and a Leghorn bonnet, trimmed with pink, with a long white ostrich-feather.

‘A sumptuous breakfast had been prepared in the banqueting-room at the castle for the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, at

which the newly-married couple presided ; whilst the tenants were feasted in the old hall, which rang with acclamations, when, at the conclusion of the repast, the master led in his bride, who returned thanks in a few words, faltering from the excess of sensibility in the speaker, for the cordial welcome they had given a stranger, and assuring them that the rest of her life should be passed amongst them in proving her sense of their kindness.

‘The evening concluded with a grand ball, at which the bride led down the dance with the Duke of Athol.

‘The lady was dressed in rich gray satin, covered with gauze of the same tint—a touching reference to her previous widowhood. The colour set off the exquisite delicacy of her neck and shoulders, and contrasted finely with the profusion of her yellow hair. Her ornaments were a magnificent tiara, necklace, earrings, and bracelets of

pearls, which, we understand, are family jewels, having belonged to the deceased mother of the young possessor of the property.

‘The festivities were continued to a late hour, and the roads round Corraline Castle long echoed with the tramp of horses conveying their tired owners to their distant homes, who will long remember the happy day which signalled the coming of age of Edward Bruce, Esq.’

‘Poor fellow!’ said Mr. Hereward to himself, as he read the account to its conclusion. Then a qualm came over him. ‘I call him poor fellow for marrying one sister; and here am I ass enough to think of committing myself by an offer to the other!'

He took up Bella’s letter again, and reperused the observations on Mariana’s temper and tyranny over her mother. Then he took out the cheque and looked at it again, to see if by possibility there could be any

truth in the statement that Mrs. Selwyn had really written it herself. But no ; it was absurd to suppose that tracing in lead-pencil, which gleamed red, green, and blue under the strong power of the magnifier, should ever have been traced by the possessor of the cheque-book. And Bella had both forged, and lied to conceal her guilt.

Then he thought of Mariana's determination to sacrifice her property for her mother's peace of mind, as many points in her favour. But he had lived too long in the world not to know that many kind and generous acts are done by persons who neutralise them by the infirmity of their tempers—persons capable of great sacrifices, who will nevertheless surround your steps with daily thorns, when you might otherwise have ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.

' 'I will not commit myself till I see more of her,' he determined.

In the mean time Mariana felt her days

very sad now the gleam was withdrawn which had promised to her a brighter future. She supposed that her life would go on as heretofore. She ought to be satisfied; of the flight of locusts which had descended on the Aspens, only the ayah and O'Rouke were left. 'Twas true that a hideous crop of bills remained, which would cripple their resources to pay; but her dear mother was regaining health and strength daily, and so long as she lived, Mariana could not feel destitute. But she must look forward a little. 'Take no thought for to-morrow' could not apply to society in its present state. She thought of the mocking questions as to her absence of accomplishments from Mr. Hereward, and shrank from the desolation of her future life. 'No one to love me—no one to love; and of no use in the world,' was her self-inflicted sentence. Then she went to her mother, and, by reiterated entreaties, obtained from her all the bills ex-

cepting that of the perfumer, with which Mrs. Selwyn would not part.

She *must* have some communication at a future time with Mr. Hereward about these bills. She wanted to know how much of her small fortune must be sacrificed. It was no joke to have to sell out with Consols at fifty-five, as she knew. She supposed she must take patience, for it seemed to her more indelicate to force herself a second time on Mr. Hereward's observation than it had been when she first appealed to him as her trustee. Those flowers were utterly shrivelled up now. She had kept them with renewed water and clipped stems, till they refused to answer longer to her care.

'I wish he had never sent them at all,' she said, 'making me think he cared for what I liked, when he has never thought of me since. My mother might have been ill, dead, and buried, for anything he knows

to the contrary. He has never cared to inquire for her. 'Tis just eight days since I saw him last.'

Every evening during those eight days Mariana had sat, when the candles were lighted, with company work on her fingers, the bag containing her mother's stockings and her own having been allowed to rest in peace. She embroidered her net to make imitation lace, with ears alert for the sound of distant wheels, which ever passed without any pause at the great gate at the Aspens. Sometimes Mrs. Selwyn read aloud to her daughter the history of England, or some volume equally discordant with Mariana's tone of feeling. What was it to her, she said, that folks had fought and died for the crown in bygone times, and that the white or red rose was the symbol of differing armies? The only roses she cared for were those which had bloomed, and now scented the room no longer, in Mr. Here-

ward's nosegay. The current of Mariana's life was as much disturbed now at thirty-six as it had been when the gay Captain had

'Sunned himself in Ellen's eyes,'

and reflected his image on that quiet stream which retained its perturbing semblance for years.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUNSHINE AT LAST.

WOMEN cannot escape their destiny, which is to love, even if they be not beloved. Mariana kissed Kelpie more fondly than ever, and made up her mind to take a long walk on the following day if the frost continued, that she might be thoroughly tired, and forget when she was falling asleep to argue the point with herself whether Mr. Hereward had ever thought of her as a wife or not.

She had just settled herself to a fresh lace rose-bud, and Mrs. Selwyn had suggested that it must be tea-time. The mother sighed to think that poor Bella was not there to demand devilled mutton and sausages, and

that she did not know where that poor dear child was, nor could guess whether any one provided her with a tempting meat-tea, when Mariana started and flushed, for there were carriage - wheels outside the great gate. They stopped. She went on working very fast, and snapped her thread. Mrs. Selwyn did not hear, and asked some question which Mariana had much ado to answer without irritation, for the words interrupted the sound of the wheels, or what she had hoped were wheels.

There was a ring at the bell now, certainly ; and this time Mrs. Selwyn distinguished the sound of wheels, and was ready to receive Mr. Hereward as the servant announced him. He entered with a look of amusement on his face, for, with all his real kindness of heart, he felt a contempt for women, as creatures very inferior to men ; and the fantastic tricks played by Bella, as narrated in the *Inverary Chronicle*,

made him merrily sarcastic. When he had seated himself next to Mrs. Selwyn he presented her with the paper, which he said would, he trusted, relieve all fears on her daughter's account. Mrs. Selwyn took the paper with shaking hands, and read with greedy eyes to the end of the paragraph; then she gave it with a sigh to Mariana. Bella might have given her one line. The poor mother's heart yearned for the love she never had obtained from her youngest daughter.

Mr. Hereward rose to go. The horses were waiting outside the door; his dinner was waiting at the Limes. He shook hands with Mrs. Selwyn, and taking from his coat a tuberose, presented it to Mariana, who coloured and curtseyed as she received it.

'Light Mr. Hereward downstairs, my dear,' said the mother, who had sunk down into her chair to re-peruse, with increased delight, the account of Bella's glories; un-

deserved as they were, they gave Mrs. Selwyn lively pleasure, for her mind was relieved of the load of doubt as to Bella's relations with Cornet Bruce. Her marriage, under the circumstances of the recent death of her husband, was an outrage on propriety; but a tie less legal would have crushed her unhappy mother to the earth.

When Mr. Hereward and Mariana reached the door, she unfastened the bolt, in which the gentleman had found some difficulty.

'Can you prevail on Mrs. Selwyn to let me tax those bills, Miss Selwyn? I think I can reduce them to half their amount, and yet leave the tradesmen a fair profit. It would be rather hard on Mr. Bruce to give him all Major O'Connor's bills to settle, and might create disturbance between the newly-married pair.'

Mariana said she hoped to avail herself of his aid, but that she wished to pay the debts rather than that her mother's already dimi-

nished income should be called on for that purpose.

‘I forgot to say,’ said Mr. Hereward, holding the lady’s hand for an instant, ‘that the hundred pounds for the forged cheque has been replaced, and nothing more will be said on the subject. It was well that you applied to me instead of to any one of my partners.’

‘I am very glad indeed that I did apply to you,’ said Mariana simply, looking up in his face; but seeing a look of quizzical amusement there, she blushed.

‘Yes,’ he continued; ‘the other two are married men. It would have been all over Exeter next day. The perpetrator must have been prosecuted, and conviction and sentence of death must have followed.’

‘How dreadful!’ murmured Mariana.

‘Yes, and all that has been avoided by your coming to me,’ said he, smiling again, and this time the pressure of the fingers was undoubted.

‘She has no notion that her sister forged the cheque. She shall never hear it from me,’ he said to himself as the carriage drove off.

Two days afterwards Mrs. Selwyn received the following letter from her daughter, with a copy of the paper forwarded to Mr. Hereward by his correspondent :

‘Castle Corraline, Argyleshire.

‘**MY DEAR MAMMA,**—You will be glad of the intelligence which the accompanying paper will convey to you. I ought properly to have forwarded it sooner, but in all the bustle of entertaining a large party in the house, it got set aside and forgotten. My change of name will, I hope, meet with your approbation ; for you never could endure my poor dear Ned O’Connor (my present husband is Ned Bruce), and really he was a very tiresome man now and then ; but may all his faults rest forgotten in his grave !

‘It seems probable that you may like to

keep Julietta to reside with you. Poor mamma, you *must* be very dull with no one but Mariana as a companion; and as Julietta is a stupid girl not likely to require to be taught accomplishments, it will be a nice thing for Mariana to educate her. She would be dreadfully in the way here at Coraline Castle, and I really cannot burden my dearest Edward with the offspring of Ned O'Connor. For the same reason I should be glad if you would keep the boy at the school at Exeter, and pay his expenses, clothes, and pocket-money. You will be able to afford that, as Julietta will not be much expense to you at the Aspens. Probably you will like to keep O'Rouke; if not, please to pay her way back to Ireland. There may be a few pounds owing to her, which you will not mind disbursing. The ayah will be able to go back to India with some outward-bound family, who will be glad to pay her passage for the sake of her services. I think

I have touched on every matter of business between us now. O, I forgot! I dropped a stone out of my ring somewhere in my bedroom at the Aspens. Tell O'Rouke to look for it for me. I think it might come safely in a letter. I hope you will not think I owe you any ill-will, my dear mamma, for the uncomfortable life you led us all at the Aspens; but really your notions about debt are so very old-fashioned, and your penuriousness so excessive, that you cannot be astonished that your conduct precipitated the step from which I date the happiness of my future life, so that I have reason to be grateful to you for an unintentional benefit. You will not grudge paying for my travelling bonnet. I desired Miss Mountstephens to send the bill to you at midsummer next. If she waits till Christmas, 'twill do her no harm, for the price is absurdly extortionate. My dear Edward is about to sell out of the army, and settle down quietly here for the

present till the Edinburgh season, when he says he shall burn to show me to his friends at the capital of Scotland. Pray let me know about the diamond, and whether it is safe.—
I remain your dutiful daughter,

‘BELLA BRUCE.’

‘Does not the name run well?’

Mrs. Selwyn let the letter fall on her lap when she had finished it. Mariana advanced her hand to take it, and after a pause finding no denial, she read it, and laid it down again with a smile. She could afford to smile now at the proposition that she, being dull and unaccomplished, should take charge of a girl too stupid to repay any effort to educate her. Bella thought she was of no use in the world! Why was Mariana so elated? She felt in fancy the pressure of Mr. Hereward’s fingers on hers, and in the band of her dress she wore the discoloured tuberose he had brought for her in his button-hole.

A few days after, and before the flower

had quite shrivelled up to nothing, arrived another basketful of hothouse flowers for Mrs. Selwyn, and a bunch of tuberoses. On the paper which encircled them was written the name of Miss Selwyn. Mariana treasured the paper, and said nothing to her mother, allowing the tuberoses to be distributed amongst the rest of the flowers. He might mean nothing after all, and then she should feel mortified and her mother disappointed.

Mr. Hereward called one day early in March, and begged to speak to Miss Selwyn.

Mrs. Selwyn's heart beat as tumultuously as did that of her daughter, as Mariana rose to receive him in the library; and Mrs. Selwyn retreated to the kitchen, to warm herself on the clean-swept hearth — at that hour, four o'clock, unpolluted by any cookery. Mary and O'Rouke had gone upstairs to dress themselves for the afternoon; so Mrs. Selwyn had space to stare at the

kitchen-fire, and build castles in the glowing embers.

'I wonder if he has made her an offer!
'Tis too good a chance to be hoped for!' were the ejaculations of the anxious mother.

Presently she heard the carriage drive off.

'She cannot have refused him!' she cried in dismay.

When she reached the library her looks questioned her daughter, whose countenance wore a shade of depression, she thought.

'Only about the bills, mother,' she said, holding a pile of them in her hand.

'O, my dear, does he think he can get the sums-total reduced?'

'He has done so, mother.'

'Ah! how can I ever pay even half of them?'

'Mother, they are all paid. I could not have our name disgraced and you made wretched by those horrid bills. I am grateful to Mr. Hereward for having acted at

my request, and selling out stock enough to pay them off. You will find them all settled, except the perfumer's; which, as you would not let me have, you must pay yourself.'

'O, Mariana! my dear child! you are indeed a blessing to me!'

And she kissed her daughter's glowing cheek, which was quivering with emotion.

'Will you love me better than you love Bella, then?' asked the jealous daughter.

'Yes; far more. I have always approved of you more; and I am now so convinced of Bella's indifference to me, that I cannot continue to lavish tenderness on an object so unworthy:

"Heart requires heart, nor will be paid
With less than it has lavished."

But, my poor child, what will you do when I am dead, and your little property spent in paying debts you never contracted?"

‘I don’t know,’ said Mariana with a tremulous smile on her lips; ‘sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’

Mrs. Selwyn saw the smile, and was comforted.

‘What can be done with those children, mother? ’Tis absurd to suppose that you should maintain them.’

‘I cannot decide at once; we will talk it over, my dear; only I am too happy this evening to think of anything disagreeable.’

Spring came, with its promise of buds and blossoms; and Mrs. Selwyn had not determined how to dispose of Bella’s children—a lurking tenderness towards Bella’s little branches indisposed her to the path which Mariana indicated as being the just one—namely, to send both children to Coraline Castle.

Mrs. Selwyn suspected that Bella did not desire to have so unerring a chronicler of her age as the tall, plain, animal-looking

girl whom she had the dissatisfaction to call daughter.

In the mean time, the precocious Julietta had taken her own line.

The young ladies of Miss ——'s establishment had been taken to a show of horsemanship at Exeter, where a young man of twenty-six years of age, who still bore the name of Master St. Clair, was the hero who witched the world with noble horsemanship. Besides being a horseman, he was an athlete; and in his dress of tight-fitting fleshings, scarlet petticoat trimmed with gold, and regal crown of pasteboard, he dazzled the eyes, and bewildered the brain, and caught the affections—so light and so vain—of the dark Julietta. It so happened that he had to pull up just below where the young ladies of Miss ——'s school were ranged in the front of the box, to allow a rival—in the person of Miss Sandcroft—to share with him the arena. Julietta dropped a flower she

took from her waistbelt on the head of the unconscious conqueror of her heart, which alighted just on his coronet, and made him look up: a pair of black eyes gleamed with intelligence on his, and an understanding was begun.

That night the young man had a consultation with his friends on the subject. 'Twas a young lady who had made advances to him; but a young lady might be a great encumbrance and no advantage. She was not good-looking at all; good eyes only. Might look well painted, if she could ride at all; and Miss Sandcroft, who was Mrs. O'Reilly, really could not go on for ever in her present situation. So love-letters were interchanged, and Miss O'Connor appointed an hour for elopement with Master St. Clair, whose real name was Ruskin.

Chance frustrated the scheme. O'Rouke, who felt an Irishwoman's affection for the

child she had nursed, walked over to Mrs. Dalby's establishment to see Julietta; as she had done so and been denied a sight of her darling on a previous occasion, she waited till the young ladies came out for their evening walk. A scrubby-looking boy was lounging about the garden-gate.

‘What are ye a-doing here?’ said Judy.

‘A-waiting to give a note to one of the young ones.’

‘Which is it for?’ said the nurse.

‘A black-looking girl. There’s a great O on the letter,’ said he, showing it.

‘There’s sixpence for ye; and now go and spend it on lollipops. I’ll give it to the young lady myself.’

The boy lingered, and seeing Judy go up to the young lady and address her, he had no doubt that the note was safely delivered.

‘Yer wanted directly at the Aspens,’ said Judy, with the quick wit of her nation.

“Tis yer grandmother has sent for ye, she has.”

Julietta stood astonished, and Judy repeated that she had been sent to the school to take Miss Julietta home, because she was wanted for something particular—she did not know what. All the time the little dirty billet was crushed in Judy’s hot hand.

Mrs. Dalby asked Julietta if she knew the servant; and on her answering in the affirmative, she sent her willingly, giving Judy her combs, brushes, and night-things.

She supposed Miss O’Connor would return to school on the following day, as it was that appropriated to the dancing-lesson.

‘The old lady didn’t say,’ said Judy veraciously.

And they left the procession of young ladies to continue their walk, and took their way towards the Aspens.

Julietta was unwilling to leave Exeter, and the chance of hearing from Master St.

Clair; but the prospect of as much hot buttered toast as she could eat was not without its attractions to the appetite of a girl not fifteen, and after all she should get her billet-doux on the following day instead.

Judy took her charge to the kitchen, and toasted the bread, and buttered it plentifully, making her a cup of her own tea, and stealing from the dairy an abundant supply of milk; and then, when the girl was placed comfortably before the kitchen-fire to enjoy these dainties with the addition of two fresh eggs, Judy went straight to the library, where Mrs. Selwyn and Mariana were sitting, and revealed her intercepted letter, placing it in the hands of the grandmother.

‘I knew the nasty rascal could be after no good,’ said she; ‘and sure the saints contrived that I should be there in the nick of time for the saving of the poor child.’

The ladies read the note, and sent Judy back to Julietta, whilst they consulted as to the best plan to be pursued with their troublesome relative. Really the vexations brought on them by Bella's unhappy marriage seemed endless.

Mrs. Selwyn hesitated as to the best course to pursue. She thought perhaps she ought to have taken the girl home before; but a little conversation with Mariana proved to her that four miles from the daring young horseman would be a dangerous distance for the residence of the Julietta who seemed disposed to act Juliet to the first Romeo she could find.

'Fancy how we should be disgraced, mother, if it was known that your grandchild, and my niece, had married a stroller, and was exhibiting herself in tight fleshings on a piebald horse!'

She added to herself, 'I am pretty sure that Mr. Hereward, who is hesitating now,

would never marry a lady with such a relative.'

Judy was recalled, praised for her care and acuteness, and provided with twenty pounds to carry Julietta by the first coach on the following morning on the road to Scotland. After they had reached London, they were to take a vessel bound for Scotland, or the twenty pounds, though so heavy a sum for the grandmother to part with, would be insufficient to take the travellers to Castle Corraline.

James was sent off with the cart immediately for the young lady's luggage from school, and Mrs. Selwyn packed up the diamond in a little paper box, and placed it in Judy's box, which Mrs. Selwyn sagely imagined would be taken greater care of than the rest of the packages.

Julietta was not informed of the plans intended for her benefit, and was served with an early breakfast before the sun rose;

and then, bewildered by the unaccounted-for circumstances, she found herself tightly packed along with Judy in an early coach proceeding on the first stage to London, without her having had the power of making any communication to her lover.

Mrs. Selwyn, always tender-hearted, took half-a-guinea from her purse to give it to the girl, but arrested her hand when she remembered that it might give Julietta the power of bribing a messenger to post a letter to the young athlete. Mrs. Selwyn was uninformed as to the depths of her granddaughter's ignorance. Julietta could not do more than a copy of pothooks and hangers herself, and her communications with her 'young man,' as she called him, had been written by a school-companion.

O'Rouke conveyed her charge safely to Inverary, and there waited for orders from Mrs. Bruce, who had been informed of the

circumstances which had made Julietta's removal from the neighbourhood imperative, by a letter from her mother.

Mrs. Selwyn's communication could not be otherwise than tender in the hopes she expressed for Bella's future happiness. She stated that neither her health nor her means would enable her to take the personal or pecuniary charge of either of her children. She had heard that the boy had expressed a wish to go to sea; and if Bella approved, she would pay his outfit, and would try to get him a nomination as midshipman on board some king's ship at Plymouth. Mrs. Selwyn thought this might be carried out through Mr. Hereward's interests, but she was careful not to use his name. She expressed a hope that Bella would receive Julietta with kindness, and exercise due care to prevent any mischance such as that from which she had so providentially escaped. She trusted she might have a few lines, to say that

O'Rouke and her grandchild had reached Corraline Castle safely.

No answer was vouchsafed by Bella; but O'Rouke, who had more sensibility for the expectations of those left at the Aspens, paid a shilling to a street scribe to write the following letter to Mrs. Selwyn:

‘MADAM,—I waited at Inverary, according to your orders, till my mistress came. She drove up in a handsome carriage and four cream-coloured horses, and two young fellows, one a-riding each side—beautiful to look at. She was a deal put out that you should have sent the poor child to her; but I told her it could not be helped; so she made the best of it, and put Miss Julietta to live in a strict school quite away in the country, where she will have a hard matter to understand a word they say; for I think the Scotch tongue is as bad as Hindostanee to make sense of.

‘I am to wait till the poor child is safe at the school—she has not found out one far enough out of the way as yet—and then she will pay my back wages, and give me money enough to take me back to old Ireland.

‘Thanking you for all favour, with my respects to Mrs. Mary, and hoping she will pardon any cross words, for my temper is quick, though tender,

‘I am your faithful servant,

‘JUDITH O’ROUKE.’

‘Well, I have done my best for them all,’ said Mrs. Selwyn; ‘and now I must try to save, and repay Mariana, poor girl, for the money she has advanced for those dreadful bills.’

It was a lovely afternoon in April, when she was enjoying the freshness of the springing herbs, and was removing with the point of her stick the heaps of withered leaves in the plantation near the house, to reveal the

groups of primroses sheltered under their moist brown covering, and stretching long slender stems, that their calices might reach the light. Engaged in this occupation, she did not hear a step on the moss-covered path behind her till Mr. Hereward spoke.

'I think, madam,' he said, 'that I have succeeded in getting a ship for that young Hopeful, and I have seen the lad, who is anxious to be off. Once on board, he cannot run away, and he will find obedience the best policy. I suspect that his ideas of bliss consist in escape from lessons—unconscious not "of the sweeping whirlwind's sway," but of that of the naval instructor, who "in grim repose awaits his evening prey." However, 'tis the best thing we can do with him.'

'*We!*' said the old lady, smiling; and she thought in silence: 'That *plural* is *singular*.' 'You have been most kind, but I am quite cognisant of the fact that the burden which ought to be borne by Bella must rest on my

shoulders only. Poor Mariana! she will not speak to me on the subject; so I must apply to you to tell me how much of her money you have sold out to pay those overwhelming bills.'

Mr. Hereward 'hemmed,' and turned away. Mrs. Selwyn saw the tip of his ear becoming red, a sign that he was angry or perplexed. There was an embarrassed silence, when she resumed timidly, for she stood somewhat in awe of Mr. Hereward, and of his mocking smiles and tones.

' You see I cannot be happy when I think that I have been instrumental in robbing one daughter for the sake of the other; and whether Mariana flings her little fortune into my lap from the impulse of her loving heart, or I take it from her by the force of persuasion, her destitution will be the result after my death; for you are aware my income ceases with my life.'

' My dear madam, annuitants never seem to die. May you live a thousand years !'

‘Might it not be better,’ resumed the lady, ‘to sink what is left of poor Mariana’s money in purchasing an annuity?’

‘No,’ said the man of business; ‘I don’t think it would be at all desirable. Women are such asses in money-matters.’

‘I do not think they are,’ replied the widow, rather affronted; ‘at any event, as a rule, they mean to do rightly.’

‘Their probity is mostly the effect of timidity,’ said the banker. ‘If they had the courage of men, what arrant swindlers they would be, with the power they have of performing feately their little treacheries!’ He was thinking of Bella.

‘I suppose,’ said Mrs. Selwyn, ‘that your low estimate of women’s nature has been the reason why you have never selected one as the companion of your life.’

‘It is, madam; and a very wise reason too. But a man is tired of being wise all his life; and so, as I see your daughter Mariana

walking on the terrace, I shall be a fool, and go and ask her to marry me. You do not object? I shall not attend to it if you do.'

Mrs. Selwyn smiled, and returned to her occupation of uncovering delicate primroses. Should she find under the unpromising spoils of age some fresh blossoms of happiness springing up unexpectedly? She predicted this, when, having revealed a fine cluster of flowers with their sturdily-veined protectors of green leaves, she turned and saw Mr. Hereward leading Mariana towards her.

'Allow me, madam,' he said, 'to introduce to you the future Mrs. Hereward.'

Mrs. Selwyn continued to live at the Aspens when Mariana was comfortably installed as mistress of the Limes, notwithstanding the entreaties of Mr. and Mrs. Hereward that she would reside with them entirely. Her income, released of the unnatural strain on it of Bella's debts, was sufficient for her simple

wants and of those of her household, including a dog of her own, a cat, and the old horse. Kelpie accompanied Mariana.

The communication went on briskly between the two houses, Mrs. Selwyn finding her strength quite equal to a walk to the Limes in the morning and back in the summer evenings. Mariana's state precluded her walking about twelve months after the date of her marriage.

When, ten years after, the mother's eyes were somewhat dim with the wear and tear of seventy-eight years, they sparkled yet when a bright-eyed, curly-headed boy rushed into her presence with his first prize, won at the grammar-school at Exeter against some hundreds of competitors. She was his best-beloved friend, for were not mamma and papa wholly engrossed by their devotion to his flaxen-headed sister of four years old? To grandmamma he brought all his troubles of broken bats and lost balls. In the library

at the Aspens he studied his holiday tasks and prepared his exercises. She thought that

‘Since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.’

There were good grounds for her admiration. The young Edgar was one of those happy combinations of bodily and mental strength which we sometimes find in the progeny of people of ripe age. A dark-haired, curly-headed boy, he ran by the aid of his nurse’s finger at nine months old; at twelve months he walked up and down stairs; at five years he read fluently, at eight had mastered the Latin grammar, and at nine had deposited his first prize on the knees of his doating grandmother. His father looked at him approvingly, but, like Mariana, he kept the full flood of his tenderness for his girl.

Mariana found that her husband had paid the money himself for Bella’s bills. ‘You did not think I should be fool enough to sell out, when Consols were at fifty-five,’ said he.

‘O dear! what will my mother say, when she finds she is under such obligations to you?’

‘She might say, man and wife are one; but she has paid me back part, and desired me to place it to your account. You had better let her go on pinching herself; she has been at it all her life, and will prefer it to the sense of obligation.’

Mariana agreed, as she did to everything which her husband propounded, which was the reason he considered her less a fool than the rest of her sex.

Thus there was the glow of an Indian summer over the closing life which had been so troubled in its progress. Mrs. Selwyn lived on to see that her grandson’s youth did not ‘unbeseem the promise of his spring,’ and she faded out of existence watched by loving eyes, tended by careful hands, and lamented by fond hearts:

‘After life’s fitful fever she sleeps well.’

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